





## THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

JUNE 12 1981

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## Ambitions of an apostate

By Christopher Hill

JOHN CAREY:

John Donne  
Life, Mind and Art  
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0 571 1636 1

Donne is perhaps the most intellectual of English poets, and John Carey is perhaps the most intelligent of contemporary English literary critics. The encounter, as one might expect, is a successful political career. Perhaps apostasy was the only way for him to avoid involvement on the pro-Jesuit side. His dilemma was similar to that of nationalists today who disapprove of terrorism in the nationalist cause. Most would prefer a quiet life, neither acclaiming nor condemning terrorism. But when a decision is forced, to decide against terrorism is not necessarily ignoble.

Already as a Catholic Donne the intellectual had reacted against the cult of miracles. *Ignatius His Conclave* reveals a strong dislike of the irrational legends which the Jesuits were peddling. Donne's attack was equalled in ferocity and wit only by the Augustinian Catholic Pascal in the seventeenth century and in our own day by Hugh Trevor-Roper. The Catholicism of the Jesuits was not the Catholicism of More the humanist intellectual. Nevertheless, Donne's apostasy meant a complete breach with deeply cherished family traditions. Two of his uncles were Jesuits. It must have had profound psychological effects. In two chapters John Carey analyses "The Art of Apostasy" and "The Art of Ambition". But the whole book is really about the consequences of ambitious apostasy. "In the fantasy world of the poems" Donne "rids himself of his disloyalty by transferring it to women".

Donne was one of those whom government policy was aimed at influencing - a member of a traditional ruling-class family who did not wish to be excluded from political life and the rewards of office by the accident of his faith. Carey points out that Donne's later hostility towards his former colleagues was directed mainly at the Jesuits. Their insistence on stirring up trouble, on becoming martyrs themselves and involving traditional English Catholics in their fate, was highly distasteful to Donne. His elder brother had probably escaped a traitor's death only by dying in jail. Donne had to

decide whether to cooperate with the Jesuit policy or to repudiate it. It was a novel policy which many traditional Catholics resented. Those less ambitious and less centrally placed could perhaps avoid decisions. But Donne lived in London, he was a member of a prominent Catholic family; his mother, descended from the circle of Sir Thomas More, was a pro-Jesuit activist. And Donne was aware of possessing abilities which entitled him to expect a successful political career. Perhaps apostasy was the only way for him to avoid involvement on the pro-Jesuit side. His dilemma was similar to that of nationalists today who disapprove of terrorism in the nationalist cause. Most would prefer a quiet life, neither acclaiming nor condemning terrorism. But when a decision is forced, to decide against terrorism is not necessarily ignoble.

Donne is attracted to the "organic mass, volume and articulation" of the human body. "His imagination intrudes into its inner structures. His impulse is towards vivisection." ("Vivisection" is another harsh word which Carey employed earlier to describe the process of hanging, disembowelling and quartering which was "used as a remedy against Catholics". In "Epithalamion made at Lincoln's Inn" "the priest comes on his knees 'embowel her', linking priestly sacrifice, sex and a traitor's death.)

Donne's interest in the fashionable science of anatomy had been stimulated by his medical education, but his concern is not really medical. He stresses the organic unity of human, animal and vegetable bodies. For all his use of modern technical terms, his approach is close to that of medieval beast-love. Lovers' eyes are threaded together on a string, their palms are cemented by sweat. "The human body is regularly assimilated to, or blended with, inanimate objects." Donne shows "a medical interest in those parts of the human anatomy . . . where life and sensation have only a dubious and qualified existence." ("A bracelet of bright hair about the bone"). "Intent on establishing the body's inner space, Donne also dwells on the nerves and filaments, which hold it together."

This extends to the animal kingdom: the flea exists "in these living walls of jet". "From the viewpoint of a grasp of the organic world, *The Progress of the Soul* is certainly Donne's masterpiece", Carey claims in a lengthy and

outdoor the mind's boundaries remains the same."

In a chapter called "Bodies" Carey examines at fascinating length Donne's absorption with anatomical structures. Rebutting the charge that "the beauty of the visual world mean nothing to Donne", Carey argues that

the shallowness of mere vision is what his poems struggle to super-vene. Whether he is writing about the human body, or animals, or plants, or inanimate objects, his effort is to engage us on other, and deeper, levels than the visual; to sensitize us, rather than to please our eyes; and to enhance our awareness both of organic life and of the solid, intransigent materials in which it inheres.

Donne is attracted to the "organic mass, volume and articulation" of the human body. "His imagination intrudes into its inner structures. His impulse is towards vivisection." ("Vivisection" is another harsh word which Carey employed earlier to describe the process of hanging, disembowelling and quartering which was "used as a remedy against Catholics". In "Epithalamion made at Lincoln's Inn" "the priest comes on his knees 'embowel her', linking priestly sacrifice, sex and a traitor's death.)

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This extends to the animal kingdom: the flea exists "in these living walls of jet". "From the viewpoint of a grasp of the organic world, *The Progress of the Soul* is certainly Donne's masterpiece", Carey claims in a lengthy and

powerful argument about a poem not hitherto a favourite with critics. "Not until Hughes's *Crow* does anything comparable to *The Progress of the Soul* happen in English poetry." "The elephant's mass is held together by strings ('life cords') which, like the 'sinew thread' of *The Funerall* suggests intricate and fibrous cohesiveness. The body in Donne is both a building and a network, and the contrasting textures these metaphors imply require contrasting but complementary physical responses from us." Donne "does not tell us what a flower looks like ('visual beauty'), but how it feels. He achieves a fusion, merging the human back into the natural world, and raising the natural world towards the mind's light." In *The Progress of the Soul* an "elaborate crowd-scene simile, complete with a personal appearance of Queen Elizabeth, is introduced for the sole purpose of telling us what it's like to be the soil round a root vegetable".

Intense concentration on the body as inextricably bound up with the soul led to Donne's early and continuing interest in the heresy of mortalism - the doctrine that soul and body are so closely intertwined that they die together, the soul reviving only at the final resurrection.

A chapter on Donne's obsession with change - fashionable among his contemporaries - suggests that it played an important role in unifying his ideas. He was "intrigued by his own changeability". The concept of change helped to determine the theological issues that would occupy him . . . just as it determined the themes and manner of the *Songs and Sonnets* . . . His insistence, for example, that everyone should get a job relates to his passion for fixedness, which stems directly from his obsession about change, and both relate, in turn, to his own aimlessness and inconsistency, and to his excitement about the idea that God changed nothing into something when he created the world . . . To change yourself into something, by getting a job, is the only fit recompense to God for changing you into something when you were nothing. "Donne's contempt and hatred for the 'herds of vagabonds' seeking employment in his England is one of the less attractive traits of the Dean of St Paul's who held two rectories, a vicarage and a prebend in plurality. Courtiers, on the other

hand, in John Carey's paraphrase, "are actually enhancing God's glory when they cover themselves with expensive textiles."

"Donne was never more paradoxical than in his preoccupation with death. He was so repelled by death and its nothingness, that he persistently and ingeniously animates it in his art, and loves to talk in his sermons as if he will be one of the few mortals exempt from dying." On the other hand his paradoxical defence of suicide, whose importance for its author Carey stresses, "was correctly seen as part of the struggle between authoritarianism and the individual reason which was to convulse the seventeenth century". But Donne also treats Christian martyrdom "as if it were quite evidently just a manifestation of the death-wish . . . Christ himself committed suicide".

Carey interestingly relates this to Durkheim's analysis of types of suicide. Common factors are a lack of integration into society or the family group, a sense of ostracism. "I would fain do something", Donne wrote to his friend Goodwyer; "but that I cannot tell what, is no wonder. For to choose, is to do: but to be no part of anybody, is to be nothing." Durkheim's anomie type of suicide has no known and limited goals, and consequently "a morbid desire for the infinite". Donne was "a martyr *manqué*, and had to live with a set of basic psychic configurations which had been oriented towards death by his educators". Hence his preposterously elaborate preparations for his own death.

Contemporary beliefs that the end of the world was at hand enabled Donne sometimes to hope "perchance I shall never die". In any case, no aspect of heaven captivated Donne more than its glory, of which he speaks "in a curiously challenging and proprietary manner". "As soon as my soul enters into heaven, I shall be able to say to the angels . . . and to . . . Christ Jesus himself, 'I am of the same stuff as you, . . . and therefore let me sit down with you at the right hand of the Father'." He could tolerate any form of death so long as it allowed him to remain alive.

The age between renaissance and seventeenth-century revolution saw a "crisis of reason". Ultimately scholastic reasoning was replaced by Baconian

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scientific rationality. Donne lived in the intermediate age of scepticism—the age of Montaigne, of Hamlet's "There's nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so", which Donne echoed. Donne had been brought up in the scholastic tradition. He reacted strongly and eloquently against it to stress the impotence of human thought to understand the universe. "New philosophy calls all in doubt." "Renaissance scepticism was a poetic advantage to Donne... because it made all fact infinitely flexible, and so emancipated the imagination. It also forced him to create a new kind of poetry." When Donne rhapsodizes about the limitless extent of human thought, he means what today we should call imagination. As against scientific reasoning, imagination becomes "synonymous with thought, and enables man to conquer the cosmos".

From time to time John Carey associates Donne with Raleigh, on one of whose ships Donne sailed in 1597. He might perhaps have made even more of the comparison. Both men were ambitious, arrogant, self-centred, intellectuals; both were so obtuse in their relations with their fellow human beings that they temporarily blighted their careers by marrying for love at the wrong time; both were ambivalent in denouncing the corruption of the court at which they strove so hard to succeed. Raleigh dabbled in science, yet agreed with Donne that man cannot "give a true reason for the grass under his feet, why it should be green rather than red". Raleigh actually tried to commit suicide, and luckier than Donne—was able to put on a performance at his execution which earned him the reputation of a Protestant martyr.

Carey leads us so sensitively into the unfamiliar ways of thinking of Donne's contemporaries that his one failure sticks out the more. To speak of the God of Calvin as a "monster in the sky" is a "sinister arbitrary sadist", is good for a modern laugh, but it can only hinder our response to a creed which exhilarated English writers from Spenser to Bunyan.

Carey's concluding chapter, "Imagined Corners", is superficially the least successful in the book. But that is, I think, because of his refusal to oversimplify, to offer facile syntheses. He has not given us all the answers, but

he has given us a set of tools with which we can do it ourselves. "What, we may start by asking, have angels, money, mandrakes, coins, maps and shadows in common, apart from the fact that they are among Donne's favourite subjects? The answer seems to be that they are meeting places for opposites". "A corner invites divergent lines or planes, but it also intrusively separates them." Though Donne "liked joining things he also liked the joint to show... What pleased his imagination was not a sense of the world's various contents amicably coalescing, but of opposites surviving within union, of paired antagonists locked together."

And that of course is what metaphysical poetry in general is about. George Herbert the courtier turned country parson, celebrating the established church in *The Temple* but recognizing that religion stood on tiptoe for America in despair of the mother country; Marvell praising Charles I's carefully stage-managed death (which drew a bigger crowd than Donne's or even Raleigh's) but accepting Oliver Cromwell as "the force of angry heaven's flame". It has been suggested of Marvell, as Carey suggests of Donne, that "his life and his poetry form a single whole", that his political poems and his lyrics share the same concerns. Crashawe (like Marvell, son of a Yorkshire Puritan minister) who longed for suffering as did John Donne but accepted in his erotic religious imagery exactly the aspects of Catholicism which Donne rejected, also demonstrates contradiction locked within unity, as do Vaughan and Traherne contrasting the innocence of childhood with the brutal realities of life in a competitive society. (Carey's comparisons and contrasts between Donne and Traherne, "temperamentally his polar opposite", are especially illuminating.)

John Carey's book will bring no joy to the declining band of those who still believe that the words on the page are so sacred that we should never ask how they got there. He uses a historical and biographical approach to arrive at literary conclusions of which account will have to be taken by the purists. His book is sensitive, searching, powerful, exciting, provocative and witty. It is a superb achievement.

## Homage to Julia

By Henry Woudhuysen

CLIFFORD ENDRES:

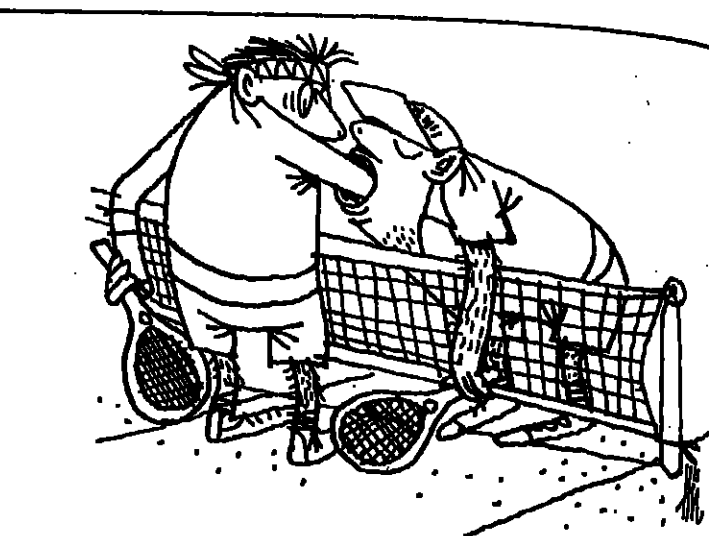
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Book 1, 325  
0 208 01832 8

Joh. Everaert, better known as Joannes Secundus—probably because an elder brother with the same Christian name died before he was born in 1511—has been claimed as the only writer of genuine Latin verse during the Renaissance. Certainly, he is one of the most attractive writers of this kind of literature and his life and works are at times reminiscent of those of Keats. Like Keats he died before he was thirty, and his best poems have a powerful sensuousness and a fascination with art. Secundus was himself a sculptor and medallist. His most famous and influential poems were the *Basia*, so admired by Ronsard and Oeetoe, and often translated into English; most memorably by Thomas Stanley. They appeared deeply to the Pleiades and the Cavalier poets and, with the beautiful *Epithalamium* have tended to obscure the rest of Secundus's work. The chief virtue of Clifford Endres's book is to focus attention on one part of it, the lesser-known *Elegies*.

Book One of these is addressed to Julia. It was probably written when the poet was in his very early twenties at Malaga and Bourges, where he studied under the great lawyer and emblemist Alain, and is a remarkable performance. By any standards, the poem borrows much from the classical elegists, especially as Dr Endres points

out, from Tibullus, and can successfully imitate Petrarch. But he makes all of this his own, transmuting his sources into "Alexandrian poetry of a unique tone and achievement, a merging of spontaneity and artifice, of naturalness and conscious art". Three Commemorative Elegies written in succeeding years celebrate his first meeting with Julia and herald the spring. But in Book Two he has abandoned his now-married former mistress for Lydia, Venerilla and Neaera and the results are less satisfactory, lacking the unity of the earlier poems. The third book is almost entirely given over to occasional verse and panegyric, including a fine description and meditation on the statues and tombs of Charles VIII, Louis XII and the woman who married both of them: Anne de Breteuil, in the Cathedral of St Denis, Paris. Secundus responded strongly to concrete art, but also to the eroticism of love. Elegy 1.10, in which he dreams he has Julia in bed with him, is particularly effective, while the opening of the second Commemorative Elegy is invitingly luscious.

Endres offers texts and translations of these three anniversary poems as well as of seventeen Elegies, most of them taken from Book One. Sketching in what little is known of their author's life, his literary antecedents and background, he provides a short-but-to-the-point commentary on each poem. Most of all, Endres would like to associate Secundus with the humanist culture of the Italian Renaissance, and his father's friend Erasmus was such a notable and influential part.



The inner game. This drawing is one of the many examples of grotesque humour to be found in Ernst Hührlmann's Na, so was (Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 3 423 01636 6).

## The princely progress

By Anthony Burgess

CLIVE JAMES:  
Charles Charming's Challenges On the Pathway to the Throne  
A Royal Poem in Rhyming Couplets with Illustrations by Marc  
104pp., Cape, £4.95.  
0 224 01954 6

To nubile Charles, yet unennobled James Presents this specimen of Higher Games, Assured, though, of at least an O.B.E. Sooner or later, for well, let's just see—Skill in the dour destructive witicism?

Besides, as is well known, our Royal Family Loves digests itself, however hammy Delivered. And again (let it be muttered) The colonially bred must be well buttered. Though unrelated to the Sage of Rye And Lion of Lamb House, James trains one eye Upon the intolable pinnacles of Style, Terser, verse, not poofier mandarin, the while He steeps the other in the pall of crystal. He weekly shatters with his fist or pistol. Nor is this Clive of India. He hails From Empire's shodder Jewel, New South Wales, Where penal memories still rawly rankle: Observe the chain-mark round the loose-socked ankle. Though Cambridge-sleeked and London-tamed, at times Like married started on Page 96 Of this new Hudibras instant mix No more fantasy than it really is.

His epic subject is the Prince of Cyrrus And all the flaming film and flummary That have oppressed our future king's career. From when he first cocked his cup-handle ear (The image is from Marc on the dust-jacket) In wonder at the loyal London racket Which warmed the Arctic day that distant June. Whereon our second (Vivaldi) mortal moon Became state welfare's onomastic bastion And head of two ecclesiastical—Erastian And Presbyterian (both, in fact, Pelagian). Through schools submissive to the harsh contagion Of OSS training camps, commando courses, Through mastery of ships, tanks, aircraft, horses (Through there his sister Anne carries the banner). The time descending condescending manner, Indeed the whole damned tough *Encyclopaedia Monarchica*, to bludgeons from the media—Striles of a playboy, morals of a monk: One cherry brandy made the whole press drunk. Now *nota bene*: James's spleen is shown. To the dirt-throwers, never to the Throne. Approving of the monarchy, its *semper Eadem*, out of temper with the temper Of Irish, wops and polacks in Australia. Who think the crown an old hat and a fathure, And can't equate corruption with republics, Demos, thinks James (here is his poem's nub) licks The dictatorial, arise when kings and queens Don't give demotivators and tongues the means To kiss blue veils in dreams or waking, cry: "God save the...". James is right, and so am I. Funnily enough, his book: You'll meet them all: Lady Jane Wemyss, Lord Bitterball, Lord Nilton and Dame Helen Gardener, Bathor Hopantz (who's she when she's at home?), Mark Pillocks, Shirley Whitley, Lord Lambchop, A. J. P. Tallipin, the whole butcher's shop. And Lady Diana Seethrough-Spiffing, "belle Of the ball," noiced Pom Shella, a lie, as well: A nice poetic tribute to the Prince, Little to make Cape's libel lawyers wince. And there's another rhapsody to come: The Laureate's epithalamium. Though, since John Betje is a thrifty man. He may retreat the one for Princess Anne—glow, white lily in London—"No, not that: Charles is no flaming lily, and that's flat: A leech, the dinkum digger makes it clear. So up with bettoons, down with the pig's ear. Rejoice with James and for Prince Charles's cheer.

## THE AMERICAS

STEPHEN THERNSTROM (Editor):  
Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups  
1,001 pp. Harvard University Press.  
£674 37512 2

Thirty years ago, in the introduction to his celebrated book *The Uprooted*, Oscar Handlin remarked (in the tone of someone throwing down a gauntlet): "Once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants were American history..." His message launched a generation of sociologists and historians on voyages of exploration. The present volume may be seen as their homecoming, laden with treasure. Stephen Thornstrom is a former pupil of Professor Handlin, himself a partner in the editorial team: the partner to whom, probably, every contributor owes some intellectual debt, large or small.

This encyclopedia, in fact, is the crown of Handlin's life's work, and the vindication of his school. It is a comprehensive and exhaustive work of his scholarship, excellently written, handsomely produced. Although I hope to show that its value transcends its usefulness to teachers and students of United States studies, I must also report that they will find it indispensable, whether as a stimulus, a guide, or simply as a source of otherwise inaccessible pieces of information (a good many of the useful bibliographies which complete each entry start off with some such sentence as "There is no literature dealing specifically with Georgians/Italians/Pakistanis in the United States"). It compares more than favourably in size and organization with various other works of reference on American history and society (there has been a small epidemic of them recently) and is entirely worthy of the great university whose name it bears. It is almost clean of misprints, its English price is the rough equivalent of its American one: the extortionate mark-up which some firms put on books from the other side of the Atlantic has been foregone. The warmest thanks and congratulations are in order.

It will be noted from the title that the subject is no longer simply the immigrants with whom *The Uprooted* was concerned. This in part reflects the obvious fact that the foreign-born now constitute only a tiny proportion of such groups as the Irish, the Jews and the Germans in America. More profoundly, the title reflects a change in perception. Over the past decade or so, the next term "ethnicity" has become something of a rage-word, for scholars have come to see it as the master-concept which can give intelligibility to the whole field of current social problems. The one of the contributors (William Petersen) has put into my head the idea that the term may one day replace "class" as the basic tool of social analysis. Even if this is too bold a claim, there can be no denying that ethnicity is capable of illuminating vast areas of modern life. This book shows what the rewards are of applying it in depth and in extension to the United States. The term *ethnos* and its derivatives are stretched pretty widely (but not, Professor Peterson shows, in his article on concepts of ethnicity beyond reason): we are told about Indian tribes, religious groups, groups dying or dead, groups that are still in the womb, or scarcely conceived. The result is an amazingly full and accurate picture of the American people today, and one prepared, indeed, to say that anything is omitted in the pages that I have not had time to read there: may, for all I know, be a discussion of environmental politics or the desirability of a balanced budget; but even if something has left out, the dominant impression is that any reader will retain will be of comprehensive usefulness. Sometimes its usefulness is quite startling: for proof, turn to the later pages of the book on the Jews and read the discussion of attitudes to Israel.

# Inventorying the immigrants

By Hugh Brogan

The words *encyclopedia* and *dictionary* seem nowadays to be almost interchangeable, at least in the minds of publishers. Someone opening the *Harvard Encyclopedia* might reasonably be surprised not to find page after page of brief entries setting out the bare facts of as many of the multifarious institutions, individuals, topics, peoples and places connected with the general subject of American ethnic groups as could be crammed into more than a thousand double-columned pages of small type. I myself was at first a little disconcerted not to find entries on the Catholic Church, Ellis Island or the US Census (but there is a long appendix on "Methods of Estimating the Size of Groups"). I was more than disappointed to find no entry on the United States or the American people: I feared that the editors might be trying to explain the motions of the planets without reference to the sun. But it soon became clear that they knew what they were about. Their 155 entries divide into three categories. Least important are the brief definitions of such terms as Anglo-Saxon and Mother Tongue; dictionary items. Perhaps there are rather too few of these (twelve by my count); presumably the number was kept to a minimum to save space and ensure coherence, but given the number of times that such terms as "sojourner" and "redemptioners" turn up and have to be explained, it may have been a false economy. Or perhaps it was feared that added definitions would make the compilation too much a dictionary; for all the other entries are truly encyclopedic, each being an essay, long or short as its subject requires, with all the sense of purpose that, since Diderot's time, an encyclopedia must possess to be worthy of the name. The largest number of these other entries are devoted to the ethnic groups themselves, all but one of which (the American people, as already noted) get an article apiece. The diversity of the US population, as it is thus revealed, will astound all but the best informed; or perhaps I am the only person who didn't know that there is a group of Azerbaijanis in the United States (mostly former German prisoners of war who escaped westward in 1945), and another of Zoroastrians (Zubin Mehta is one of them).

The third group of entries consists of twenty-eight thematic essays: the core of the encyclopedia. Not only do these essays, each by a distinguished scholar, draw together the information assembled in the group entries and show its significance, but by the different angle of approach which each theme imposes they constantly throw fresh and unexpected light on the whole field. For instance, the three essays on "American Identity and Americanization" (by Philip Gleason), on "Assimilation and Pluralism" (by Harold A. Abramson), and on "Concepts of Ethnicity" (by William Petersen) all cover much of the same ground; they cite much of the same evidence, and their conclusions strongly reinforce each other; but the differences between their approaches make a real effort to see how they relate to each other. The effort is well rewarded: our brains profit from every page. It is in these essays, and the others like them ("Education", "Intermarriage", "The American people, as such", get their share of attention, whether as a group that was born in 1607 and attained maturity in the Revolution, or as an entity that has changed, and been changed by, other ethnic groups since its beginning (the article on Jews tells us that they first arrived in New York in 1654, when it was still New Amsterdam). The article on "naturalization, for instance, traces the evolution of law and policy that matter since the English Middle Ages. Philip Gleason is careful to do justice, though briefly, to the roots of American republicanism in the English Whiggery. Bernard Bailyn has long ago shown in vain, nor has the culture and society of the thirteen colonies been neglected. I regret that

Tocqueville's useful term for this earliest of ethnic or immigrant groups, "the Anglo-Americans", has not found favour (there is a brief entry on "Anglo-American", but it is only concerned with contemporary usage); but otherwise the subject receives more than ample justice. Thus, the article on the English was written by Charlotte Erickson, of the London School of Economics. Professor Erickson is the world's leading authority on nineteenth-century English emigrants to the United States, and she rightly devotes most of her space to that important topic. In view of the thematic essays she might have gone even further, and omitted all mention of the colonial period; but as it is she includes a brief sketch which at least sets her "invisible immigrants" against a visible background.

The other main feature of the encyclopedia is the set of eighty-seven maps. They are beautifully drawn, but are nevertheless, alas, the book's one certain failure. So far as I can judge, they are substantially accurate, except for the one on England, which puts Birmingham in Worcestershire, and does not include Middlessex at all. Not enough work seems to have been done to relate the maps to the texts of the articles which they are supposed to illustrate. For instance, since Patrice Higonnet found it necessary to refer to La Rochelle, Polou and Saintonge in his article on the French, these places should have been marked on the accompanying map of France, absurdly small though it is.

But this sort of blemish is less important than the general lack of cartographical imagination. It seems bizarre, to say the least of it, that the only maps of the United States are those showing respectively the pre-Columbian and the present-day distribution of the Indian tribes. Their extreme usefulness should have suggested parallel ideas to the editors, for example a map of Africa showing the location of the principal population groups in that continent (in 1650, just as the importation of African slaves into the English colonies got seriously under way. The maps in Roger Anstey's *African Slave-Trade* would have made a good model. Instead we get a map showing the names and frontiers of the post-colonial states, the sort of map to be found in any school atlas. Malidwyn Jones's charmingly urbane article on the Scotch-Irish explains the dispersion of that group across America with the utmost attainable lucidity, but still a map would have helped, especially as it cannot be assumed that every user of the encyclopedia will know exactly where (for instance) the Cumberland Valley is, or even how it differs from the Cumberland Gap. And instead of that unfortunate map of Old England it would have been amusing, and possibly valuable, to include one of Lincolnshire, East Anglia and Essex, and of the West Country too, showing all the place names (Auteborough, Bowton, Dedham, Exeter, Falmouth, Groton...) which were to be scattered over New England. There could have been a map of their distribution in that region too. Together they would have made the point, which recurs in the group entries again and again, that however sharp and deeply felt were divisions between men from different villages and regions in the old country (whether England, Ireland, Calcutta or Germany), in America these local distinctions were ignored by the natives and gradually abandoned by the immigrants as they came to be identified, and to identify themselves, as simply English, Irish, Italian and so on, before becoming plain or hyphenated Americans. Finally, a map, or series of maps, showing the ethnic neighbourhoods of New York, would have been an

enormous help to those who do not have the geography of lower Manhattan at their fingertips; much more use than the dozen or so overlapping maps of central and eastern Europe which illustrate the articles on the Germans, the Austrians, the Jews, the Belorussians, and so on (and on the map of Poland, by the way, the names of the provinces, printed in grey ink, can barely be read against the shading which shows the Polish-speaking areas in 1910).

Maps, though desirable, are not essential: an authoritative text is. The editors have unquestionably given us, their encyclopedia will dominate the field for the foreseeable future, especially if the money can be found to keep it up-to-date. Properly used, it might even change the way Americans look at themselves. "What then is the American, this new man?" asked Crèvecoeur two hundred years ago, in a passage which Professor Thornstrom's contributors delight to quote, and to disagree with. For he predicted the melting of individual Europeans into a new race of men, much as the English Jew, Israel Zangwill, did in his celebrated play *The Melting Pot*. The encyclopedia shows that, whatever may have happened to the immigrants (it was an extremely complex process), they have not yet melted into a homogeneous mass, and show no sign of doing so. Some new metaphor will have to be found.

It must not be imagined that the interest of this book is only for Americans and those concerned with that society. The concept of ethnicity, and of the dynamic processes which create and destroy ethnic groups, is of ever-wider relevance, as, in spite of the best efforts of governments, more and more countries receive mass and more diverse immigrants (the United States alone has received eleven million immigrants in the past thirty

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"Americanness" of American literature, tracking it to its psychological, sociological, and historical origins and following it as it evolved into distinctly national literary genres, especially the romance. The fine books of Richard Chase and Joel Porte, R. W. B. Lewis and Leslie Fiedler, Daniel Hoffman and Roy Harvey Pearce, taking issue with one another as they seemed to do from year to year, now coalesce into a canon of complementary works, notable, among other things, for how extraordinarily readable they are. It is in this tradition that Michael Bell's work is offered, and although in its freshness the challenge it presents to the others seems prominent, it, too, is ultimately complementary, and of a high quality.

Bell begins with the shrewdly conservative aim of pursuing this matter of the distinctiveness of the American romance by asking a question that the objective record should be able to answer. When an author said, as Irving Hawthorne, and Melville, among others, did say, that he was writing a romance, what did he mean by it? In his first reach, Bell does not attempt to answer the question by inferring from the romances written when the authors "must have" meant. Rather, he examines the aesthetic theories read by the authors, their own explicit remarks, and the comments they elicited from their contemporaries. His early chapters illustrate with attractive, bright, intelligence that romance was early seen as an indulgence of the imagination detached from the understanding and thus, in common-sense terms, dangerously anti-social, so that the decision to become a romance writer was, on one hand, a calculated step out of society if not a gesture of defiance of it. On the other hand, the romance, and of these Hawthorne is the most notable, instead of accepting the subjective nature of the "romantic" or "poetic," attributed these qualities to reality rather than their own imaginations and so attempted to attach fiction to fact.

From his thoroughly convincing base, Bell moves out into two increasingly larger and more problematic areas. Taking his clue from James, who furnishes the phrase of the book's subtitle, he says that Hawthorne's conservative historicization of romance notwithstanding, romance did mean a sacrifice of relation between imagination and actuality. This leads him to a consideration of his subjects (Charles Brockden Brown and Poe in addition to those already mentioned) as conscious deviants from their culture.

Finally, Bell's argument leads him to the widest sphere: the American romance as an exploration of America. In his own words, "he examines the ways in which Hawthorne, and Melville, consciously exploited the dilemma of the romance to understand what they saw as an analogous dilemma facing the national experiment."

It is hardly surprising that the farther Bell reaches the more debatable his generalizations become. To be sure, the romancers were alienated in the gross sense of their attempting to earn a living by an activity very unlike the pursuits of their commercial countrymen. But his model of alienation is too remote and implies that although his subjects were different from one another, the society from which each was alienated was a constant. I more than suspect that if a Philadelphia lawyer, a vagabond Southern orphan, and a snug New York importer all decided to be "alienated," each separated himself from a different thing than did the others.

Moreover, it is far from certain that the biographical evidence must be read in support of this theory of conscious deviance. Hawthorne, for example, a penniless young father, nevertheless found himself more encouraged and financially supported by his friends from the solid, unimaginative, workaday world; they seemed terribly proud of him. And the notorious doubts Melville's family had about his romancing seemed to have stemmed from his later inability to sell his books rather than from his moral decision to write them.

But to take issue with Bell on such matters is to make too much of the path he chooses to follow and too little of what that path enables him to note. His particular observations on one or another work of literature are both level-headed and convincing. I know no better reader of Hawthorne, for example. He clearly and valuably separates the allegorical inclinations of the characters from their creator's illustrative use of them rather than of allegory itself. "Hawthorne's emblems," he shows, "generally illustrate not his ideas but those of his characters," and he is right. Bell's astute reading of such writing, takes as "Young Goodman Brown" prompt one to reflect that, after all, the great fuss over the symbol meaning of the scarlet letter is a fuss made by the character in the novel. Why treat Hawthorne as Hester or her townspeople? When asked what the A is, little Pearl says it is the letter A found in her hornbook. She is too young to think differently and Hawthorne is too wise to do so. He is the masterful historian of the human insistence on "allegorizing" experience into rigid "iron" forms, cut off from life and suppressive of it.

The separation of Hawthorne from viewpoints he dramatizes is only one of the further rewards Bell offers after the gift of his fine introductory explanation of what it meant to the romancers to be romancers. There is no question that *The Development of American Romance* deserves every centimeter of the space it will occupy on the shelf of standard works on the evolution of an American literature; it will influence many students, and it should.



"Le Discours du Prêtre," a watercolour by Jean Louis Forain included in a sale of "Impressionist and Modern Watercolours and Drawings" to be held at Christie's, 8 King Street, London SW1 on Tuesday, June 30. Also included in the sale are a number of works by Munch, Signac, Picasso, Klee, Vuillard, and Utrillo.

## Tricks of the trade

By E. S. Turner

**HOUDINI: Miracle Mongers and Their Methods** 240pp. New York: Prometheus Books. \$13.95. 0 87975 143 6.

For a man who thrived on mystifying the public, Harry Houdini took an odd delight in exposing the secrets of his fellow performers. He even devoted a book to unmasking the famous French illusionist, Jean Eugene Robert-Houdin, in admiration of whom, many years earlier, he had called himself Houdini (he was born Ehrich Weiss, in Budapest). His excuse must be that it was a contentious and self-advancing trade. More to his credit were his attacks on those who cheated the bereaved at séances.

*Miracle Mongers and Their Methods* was first published in 1920. Although the jacket shows the author against a background of "spirit" presences, he is little concerned here with bogus mediums. He

concentrates on fire-resisters, sword-swallowers, poison-drinkers and the like over whom "oblivion threatens to stretch their darkening wings".

It is chiefly as a reminder of peculiar feats once accepted as entertainment — not least by "the crowned heads of Europe" — that this ragbag of a book is worth reading. As a vaunted work of exposure it is disappointing. Even the loyal James Randi ("the Amazing Randi") says in a foreword: "There is a certain amount of naïveté apparent in the text as if Houdini was not completely confident that some of the methods he describes would readily work." For-mulæ like those for desensitizing the tongues against the pain of red-hot metal are derived, as Randi says, from charlatans "who would not have risked their own prescriptions for any reward".

The book was compiled from a mass of cuttings and old books about wonder-workers. When Houdini wrote, works like Chambers' *Book of Days* and also given away numerous tracts, including the art of drinking molten lead. The author quotes a fire-eater called Barnello who explains that the end of a poker should be well weakened by bending before it is made red-hot, so that it can be bitten off easily; and Houdini adds, presumably echoing Barnello, "No performer should attempt to bite off red-hot iron unless he has a good set of teeth." Among Houdini's own maxims is: "Never inhale breath while performing with fire. *Flame drawn into the lungs is fatal to life.*"

Fire-eaters will probably always be with us (for some reason, they frequent "Strasbourg"). The old-time adepts, like the one watched by John Evelyn at Lady Sunderland's house, would put a live coal on the tongue, top it with a raw oyster and blow on the coal with bellows until it sparked and flamed.

Conceivably, in far-away places, performers like "the incombustible Spaniard" and "the Russian salamander" are not yet extinct. Their specialty, sitting on hot coals, even enjoyed something of a vogue early in the last century. A woman performer, to show there was no deception, introduced live animals into the chamber where they died of convulsions. Chambers, the most distinguished heat-resister, took a leg of mutton with him into the oven and waited till it was cooked (patrons of the new-fangled Turkish baths were later to perform similar feats with eggs). To while away the time in his

hot seat Chebert quaffed phosphorus and arsenic, going one better than rivals who merely gargled with sulphuric acid. Anxious not to be found wanting, Houdini copied out pages of antidotes to poisons from medical dictionaries.

Sword-swallowers, whose "profession" the author rather admires, are certainly not extinct. There is a picture of an Edwardian lady, with a whole cluster of hilts protruding from her mouth. Few will need to be told that blades for swallowing are decidedly thinner than cavalry sabres. It is all a question of overcoming the initial nausea, says Houdini, who does not appear to have nourished any appetite for cold steel; but he says "practice will soon accustom any throat to the passage of the blade".

Sometimes he seems more eager to encourage emulation than to expose, though he would not have us copy the lithophagous who swallow stones, hot or cold, in such numbers. We they clink together in the belly. He is told that this art is in disrepute, not because people think it dangerous, but because its followers claim that they are honestly "claiming" that they are nourished on stones alone. Houdini is also against the water-spouter who, having tanked up beforehand, ejects copious streams of liquid, including "claret". He has seen only one performer who could gulp the frogs with any dignity and he has no time for snake-swallowers. In passing, he mentions how the barytone Billington told him he hardened himself to the demands of his office by killing rats with his teeth.

The illustrations to the book ought to be a rare feast, but they are reproductions and sometimes it is hard to distinguish what feats of daring are being portrayed.

Some poignancy attaches to the account of men with midlives strong enough to support anvils, on which hammer blows are struck (apparently "sustaining the anvil is the whole matter, and the heavier the anvil, the less the blows are felt"). Blog-rappers tell us that in 1926 Houdini, in a dressing-room of an American theatre, assured student visitors he could well withstand powerful batteries in the stomach region. One of the students, rained sudden heavy blows on him as he relaxed on a couch and the result was a ruptured appendix, followed by death. "No performer should allow a stranger to hit him in the stomach until he has proved his muscles," would have made a useful footnote to the book.

**SEWERYN BIALER: Stalin's Successors: Leadership, Stability, and Change in the Soviet Union** 311pp. Cambridge University Press. £12.50. 0 521 23518 9

**SEWERYN BIALER (Editor): The Domestic Context of Soviet Foreign Policy** 411p. Croom Helm. £14.95. 0 7099 0623 4

General studies of Soviet politics have become rare and those dealing with Russia's future even rarer; for this reason alone Seweryn Bialer should be congratulated for tackling a topic which is of necessity both speculative and risky. Bialer was active in the Polish Communist party before he went to America and became a Professor of Government at Columbia University. In the present context, his experience has no doubt been an advantage; the writer has learnt from the official of the party Central Committee when it comes to discussing the question of succession in Eastern Europe. Bialer should be less likely to go astray than his colleagues who may specialize in "decision-making", but who in private life have few decisions to take other than putting a mark on their students' term papers.

As the author of a valuable earlier study on Stalin and his generals, he is as familiar as anyone can be with recent Soviet history and has, furthermore, read widely in the social sciences. In fact, he is sometimes a little overawed by academic theory on such matters as elites, legitimacy, modernization and so on. On occasions he invokes the authority of colleagues and provides references only to come up with statements such as: "One characteristic of the last, mature stage of Stalinism provides the focal point for understanding the phenomenon of Stalinism as a whole. It is a personal dictatorship"; or "We do not know how much longer Brezhnev will remain in office. We do expect, however, that as long as he does remain his personnel policy will remain basically intact"; or "No easy choices are available to any set of Soviet leaders in the 1980s." These and quite a few other similar statements are perfectly true, but so obvious as to be scarcely worth making.

*Stalin's Successors* contains a wealth of material on topics such as elite turnover, career experience and the age of party secretaries, but Bialer's own conclusions are not readily apparent; like certain pilgrims, he seems to be under an injunction to take two steps back for every three that he has advanced. Time and again the impression is created that a daring and controversial statement is about to be delivered, and sometimes it will indeed be made, only to be modified immediately and hedged about with many qualifications. To give just two examples: Bialer states towards the end of his book that while, in the 1970s, the Soviet system displayed a high level of stability and continuity, this may be seriously shaken in the coming decade, only to retreat in the very next sentence, where he writes that the changes which may take place will not constitute a crisis of the system nor lead to a transformation of the Soviet government; in the sentence after that he retreats yet further: "of course I am not at all certain that major changes will take place. What I do project is a significant increase in pressure for change." In short, little of his original prediction remains.

Elsewhere, Bialer devotes considerable space to the question of generational change, trying to provide a "profile" of the potential new Soviet leaders and to identify the characteristics that differentiate them from those whom they will replace. After some brave attempts of this kind, however, everything becomes blurred: it is not clear whether change will take place suddenly or gradually or whether perhaps it has already taken place. Eventually the author concludes that "we do not suspect that the new generation is politically homogeneous." Nor does he suggest that it will be any easier for the West to deal with in the international

arena; the new leadership may well be more liable to take risks than the present one. The only certainty then is that the new generation will be different from the old, and on second thoughts Bialer is not absolutely sure even about this: the new generation only "seems" to be different, it "might be different as a group".

It is perfectly normal for those writing about future contingencies to hedge their bets, yet Bialer's caution seems excessive. Sections of *Stalin's Successors* read either as if they were written by a committee, with the rapporteur trying to accommodate conflicting viewpoints, or as if the author, as he wrote, realized that current events somehow did not bear out his original assumptions. On the very first page there is a curious footnote which possibly provides the clue: according to Bialer, some observers contend that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan represents nothing new in Soviet behaviour, but merely that Western perceptions of Soviet policies have been changed by it, especially among those who did not expect such a move. "In my opinion, the invasion of Afghanistan signifies a major change not only in Western perceptions of Soviet policies, but also in Soviet perceptions and behaviour," Bialer writes. He may or may not be right (I think he is quite wrong); what really matters is the fact that the invasion surprised him and thus compelled him to re-examine some of his basic ideas on the subject.

Despite Bialer's caution, certain ideas and viewpoints clearly emerge from his book. He regards himself as a moderate, or "centrist" (to use the old left-wing parlance), who sympathizes neither with the views of George Kennan (who "avoids coming to grips with hard problems by soaring over them") nor with extreme opponents of Kennan such as Richard Pipes and Leo Labedz ("whose view of the Soviet Union from a set mould moulds those of his colleagues who believe in the 'institutional pluralism' of the Soviet system and who have proposed that the Brezhnev era would be best understood if one attributed to him the sort of motives we attribute to most politicians in the West. But Bialer dissociates himself reluctantly, his heart still seems to be with the pluralists and certainly not with those who hold the 'frozen view'").

To those unfamiliar with the internal debates among Sovietologists, these disputations may appear about as topical, as relevant and as intelligible as, say, a quarrel between remonstrants and anti-remonstrants in seventeenth-century Church history. In actual fact, they are of importance, even though historians a few hundred years hence may take a different view. The debate is not between "lightning enemies" and "fizzling sympathizers" of the Soviet Union, as many commentators tend to do; it is, rather, a debate between a man of the left, it is a legitimate discussion between observers of the Soviet scene who believe that, broadly speaking, the Soviet system has changed since Stalin, but not all that much, and that détente, while not a complete fraud has been largely a unilateral affair. Kennan, on the other hand, takes a more sanguine view of détente and of Soviet foreign political intentions in general. Bialer's "middle position" is not above suspicion because he pays far more homage to the advocates of détente at almost any price than to its critics. He writes, for instance, that the late Isaac Deutscher's expectations of major changes in post-Stalinist Russia were "closer to the mark" than those of most other observers. Deutscher wrote soon after Stalin's death of "the coming epoch which may bring with it a breathing Soviet attempt of this kind, however, every thing becomes blurred: it is not clear whether change will take place suddenly or gradually or whether perhaps it has already taken place. Eventually the author concludes that "we do not suspect that the new generation is politically homogeneous." Nor does he suggest that it will be any easier for the West to deal with in the international

arena; the new leadership may well be more liable to take risks than the present one. The only certainty then is that the new generation will be different from the old, and on second thoughts Bialer is not absolutely sure even about this: the new generation only "seems" to be different, it "might be different as a group".

# Mist over Moscow

By Walter Laqueur

location of the centre has shifted during the past two or three years — not because of any startling turn taken by the debate between the détenteists and the anti-détenteists, but because of the actions of the Russians. This shift appears quite clearly in some of the contributions to the interesting volume of essays, *The Domestic Context of Soviet Foreign Policy*, which Professor Bialer has edited. Most of these were apparently written in the transition period between "late détente" and the invasion of Afghanistan. American Sovietologists, needless to say, do not form a monolithic party, but it is fair to say that during most of the 1970s it was fashionable in many circles there to maintain that the Soviet Union was undergoing a gradual, albeit slow process of liberation, that Eurocommunism was a movement of the utmost political significance, that more often than not Soviet policy was showing restraint in foreign affairs, that there had been no substantial changes in the global correlation of power, that on the contrary Russia had sustained a long series of setbacks — and that any sceptical of these obvious propositions was at best an eccentric, or more likely a dithering Conservative, "continuing to operate with mental images carried over from Munich and Pearl Harbor to Yalta and Vietnam" (A. Dal-lin).

These views were more fashionable among political scientists than historians, and had less to do with the realities of international affairs than with the general post-Vietnam mood

on the American domestic scene in general, and on the university campuses in particular. But then the mood changed again and this is reflected in Bialer's symposium. Thus Adomeit (unlike Professor Dallin) believes that overall Soviet foreign and military policies have been remarkably successful. J. Azrael does not share the optimism previously voiced on many occasions about centrifugal pressures leading to a fully-fledged political crisis in the Soviet Union; Connor expects the next Politburo to look more or less like the present one, and Korbonski sees significant democratization in Eastern Europe. Lastly, we have Bialer himself concluding that the Soviet Union is obviously not a "sated power".

The two volumes together raise questions about the general level of Soviet studies in the United States — and the same questions apply of course to other Western countries. These are not bad books; indeed, it would be difficult to think of better ones published in recent years. The essays on economic topics, for example, are excellent, even if they suffer from what seems to be a longer than average interval between writing and publication. The merits of the other essays, however, are less obvious: the impact of academic political science on Sovietology seems to have been a mixed blessing. Three decades ago there were only a handful of Sovietologists in the United States but their contribution to our understanding of the Soviet Union was very consider-

able. Can the same truthfully be said about today's practitioners? Admittedly, it was easier to write pioneering works in 1950 than it is today, but this is surely not the whole explanation. It is doubtful whether the late Naum Lasny, or Boris Nikolaevski, or Solomon Schwartz would have been able to write a paragraph such as the following (to quote from *Stalin's Successors*):

To suggest that a core set of beliefs, norms and values is shared within and among the Soviet elites is not to imply that they are shared by each organizational or functional elite segment to the same extent, with the same intensity. As a matter of fact, the whole notion of institutions and institutionalizations assumes the process of selection and correlation with power of diverse primary values in different functional and organizational segments of the elites.

In every field of study there is a tendency to magnify existing differences of opinion, and Sovietology is no exception. Most people working in the field will quite likely agree with most of Bialer's propositions, largely no doubt because of his great caution in advancing them. But there remains the question what all the recent literature on the subject including these books has added to our understanding of things Soviet beyond the fact that Brezhnev and his colleagues are no longer in their first youth and that their successors will face certain problems and will have to make certain decisions.

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# The sickness and the cure

By Phyllis Grosskurth

**BERNARD STRAUS:**  
The Madolles of Marcel Proust  
Doctors and Disease in His Life and Work  
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**RANDOLPH SPLITTER:**  
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148pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul.  
£10.50.  
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The Aesthetics of Sexuality in the Life,  
Times, and Art of Marcel Proust  
327pp. Columbia University Press.  
\$29.25.  
0 231 05036 4

Where are the madeleines of yesterday? The bell announcing Swann's arrival, the flowering hawthorn, the spires of Martinville, the little phrase from Vinteuil's sonata, the yellow patch on Vermeer's "View of Delft", the uneven paving stones? Gone, all gone, those delights of our youth. What we are now asked to contemplate are Proust's dyspepsia, his asthma, his lassitude, his hay fever, his impaired vision, his chronic indigestion, his anaemia, his headaches, his kidney complaints, his caraches, his arthritis, his drug addiction. Proust the creator is drowned in Proust the neurotic, Proust the hypochondriac, Proust the schizoid, Proust the pervers. Art has surrendered to pathology.

Bernard Straus, a professor of medicine at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York, has read Proust very carefully as a case history and I should imagine that *The Madolles of Marcel Proust: Doctors and Disease in His Life and Work* may be recommended as a textbook for medical students in their freshman year. Clearly Dr Straus would like to have Proust re-incarnated so that he could get his hands on him in order to apply all the most advanced drugs which were inaccessible to Proust's bewildered battery of physicians. Straus sees him as the "quintessential neurotic" but he would be in no doubt how to handle "this epileptic, effete, pampered darling, this wretched child, querulous, asthmatic, dependent ne'er-do-well son". A good spanking! It's implied, but hardly the sort of treatment designed to alleviate the sufferings of a neurotic genius who either circumvented or utilized his sufferings in the service of his art.

Dr Straus seems convinced that Proust's asthma was not psychological in origin but was what he calls "extrinsic asthma". If he were given a skin test today his fever would probably be detected and he would be given a serum called immunoglobulin E and antihistamines. His poor eyesight was "probably simply presbyopia, the impairment of near vision associated with ageing." If he hadn't been so vain, he would have worn glasses habitually. His anaemia was probably the result of inadequate diet. The "fevers" could have been connected with his asthma. Straus, because of the inadequacy of the diagnosis, doubts whether Proust suffered from albuminuria or kidney disease. His trouble was possibly external otitis which could have been caused by his neurotic dependence on earplugs. Besides, he needed some ventilation in his cork-lined room. His death at fifty-one from a pulmonary infection was due to "inadequate diet, probable pneumonia, and vitamin lack, poor hygiene, inflamed and irritated bronchi." What, no cholesterol?

When Dr Straus reaches Proust's homosexuality, his prose soaks into the empyrean. Proust was a practicing homosexual for most of his adult life. This was an important aspect of both his life and his work. Attitudes towards homosexuality in Proust's day were not as understanding or as permissive as they are today and Proust was especially desirous of sparing

his family from the obloquy attached to this orientation. He reminds us that the narrator of *A la recherche du temps perdu* is not homosexual. This is the crux of Straus's belief that Proust viewed his own "orientation" with horror and that his treatment of characters like Jupien and the Baron de Charlus was one of "ridicule, humor, malevolence, and ill-disguised distaste. It was a form of self-hate. He was homosexual in spite of himself." Straus is unable to disguise his own abhorrence of homosexuality, and his mind is so literal that he fails to detect the irony in Proust's attitude both to his readers and to his characters.

Randolph Splitter's *Proust's Recherche: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation* is a book of an entirely different order. He acknowledges his debt to Frederick Crews (despite the latter's apostasy, which enlivened the pages of *Commentary* last year). When Splitter calls his book "a psychoanalytic interpretation", he does not specify what kind of psychoanalysis, is he a Kleinian without knowing it, or is he prudently avoiding any reference to vision, his chronic indigestion, his anaemia, his headaches, his kidney complaints, his caraches, his arthritis, his drug addiction. Proust the creator is drowned in Proust the neurotic, Proust the hypochondriac, Proust the schizoid, Proust the pervers. Art has surrendered to pathology.

Splitter points out that the narrator in the opening pages of *A la recherche du temps perdu* is a disembodied voice. We assume that he is an adult but he speaks with the defenceless immediacy of a child. From the refuge of his bed he is surrounded by hostile objects muffled by darkness. His helplessness can be contained only by the ritual of punctilious habit embodied in the precarious good-night kiss. He displaces anxiety in anticipation of the very spot on his mother's cheek on which he will implant his kiss. His father, who seems to separate him from this necessary ritual, is cast in the role of oedipal bogeyman, and yet when he makes the concession of suggesting that his wife spend the night in the boy's room, Marcel surrenders to torrents of tears, guilty because he has betrayed his mother by his anxious dependence on her.

A Kleinian would use the same terminology and perspective in his approach to the narrator's neurosis: projection and introjection of part objects, anxiety, aggression, and a super-ego formed from an attempt to introject idealized parental figures. Professor Splitter is particularly interesting in his discussion of Marcel's fascination with the magic lantern, which has the ability to assimilate everything into itself. If it can absorb beauty, it can also absorb horror. Similarly, the artist ingests objects which in turn he projects into a re-created world. The hawthorns have become part of himself and so have the tortured rats. In Melanie Klein's interpretation of Ravel's *L'enfant et les sortilèges* she praises the librettist, Colette, who understands the child's anxiety to effect separation to his mother for their mutual betrayal. The German title of the opera, *Das Zauberkloster* ("the magic word"), and when the child protagonist conquers his godlike means of pity and sympathy for a wounded squirrel, he whispers the redeeming word: "Mama." The artist, the magic lantern, has absorbed, controlled his neurosis by the transmutation of his experience into an eternal present. This is not an explanation of the mystery of genius, for neurotics are certainly not all geniuses, but it possibly explains how a genius utilizes his suffering. As Splitter says, "The pages of writing are the suffering, but they are also the means of thinking the suffering. They are, in Proust's central paradox from Proust's descriptions of love, the sickness and the cure."

If I read both Professor Splitter and Melanie Klein correctly, Proust's situation is one in which the conditions of love are too often unattainable, guilty, betrayal. Splitter suggests that Marcel's relationship with Albertine is "a kind of diary of a madman which

must be read as an iron self-portrait of a self-deluded narrator". One loves what is different from oneself but at the same time bitterly resents it. Proust seems to adopt Ulrich's view that the homosexual is a woman locked inside a man's body - *anima muliebris virili corpore inclusa* - one who loves other men and yet is terrified of their female qualities.

This theory of congenital androgyny doesn't explain the origins of homosexuality, but it suggests a fundamental paradox: according to Marcel, effeminate homosexuals love manly, virile men who are not homosexuals and cannot love them in return. Marcel assumes that homosexuals, by definition, are not "manly", even if, like Charlus with Jupien, they play an aggressive, "masculine" role, but the example of Charlus, alternately violent and gentle,

never been any demonstrable proof that homosexuality is caused by a dominant mother and that, whatever the family situation, orthodox Freudians can interpret the facts in any number of ingenious ways, but I do not think one can entirely dismiss Freud so long as one regards such theories as epistemological hypotheses. Nevertheless, a lot of nonsense has been written about Proust because people have tended to accept stereotypes as gospel; and Rivers is doing a service when he asks us to re-examine our whole attitude to sex, to consider the proposition that the idea of specific identity is illusory, and that man is inherently a pansexual creature. Rivers is ready to agree that Proust himself shared Ulrich's view of the homosexual, a view widely current at the time, but takes issue with those who would argue that Proust's creations are consequently flawed and



Proust on his death-bed, November 18, 1922; a sketch by Dunoyer de Segonzac

that women like Albertine are simply transposed males.

It seems to me that Rivers is so angry with Justin O'Brien and George Painter because they seem to view homosexuality pejoratively that he weakens his own argument. Since the publication of Painter's biography, incontrovertible evidence has turned up that Albertine mirrored all Proust's frustrated passion for his chauffeur Agostinelli, and that Painter was wrong in his conviction that the character of Albertine was conceived from the time Proust blocked out the first outline of the novel. What this new material reveals is that there can be no such thing as a definitive biography and that with a novel as richly autobiographical as *A la recherche du temps perdu* the final word will never have been said.

When Rivers wrote his book, Terence Kilmartin's new translation of the novel had not yet appeared. Most English-speaking readers are familiar with the novel through the Scott Moncrieff translation; and Rivers is very suspicious of Scott Moncrieff's attitude to homosexuality claiming that he bowdlerized the two references to masturbation in the novel. In Proust's description of his solitary pursuits in the little room under the roof where he could see as far as the keep of Roussainville-le-Pin, he writes: "Vastes pièces de longtempes de refusa pour moi, sans doute, parce qu'elle était la seule où je me fus permis de fermer à clef, à toutes celles de mes occupations qui s'élevaient une inviolable solitude: la lecture, la rêverie, les larmes et la volupté." According to the Scott Moncrieff version, "It was the only room whose door I was allowed to lock, whenever my occu-

pation was such as required an inviolable solitude; reading or dreaming, secret tears or paroxysms of desire." In Kilmartin's translation a highly figurative "paroxysm of desire" becomes simply "sexual gratification".

In the second reference to masturbation, the original reads: "... avec les hésitations honteuses du voyageur qui entreprend une exploration ou du désespéré qui se suicide, défilant, je me voyais moi-même une route inconnue à que je croyais mortelle, jusqu'au moment où une trace humaine comme celle d'un collimateur s'ajoutait aux feuilles du caqui sauvage qui se penchaient sur moi."

Scott Moncrieff has translated the passage thus:

I explored, across the bounds of my own experience, an unbroken path which, I believed, might lead me to my death, even—small passion spent itself and left me shuddering among the sprays of flowering currant which, creeping in through the window, tumbled at about my body.

And now Kilmartin:

I explored, across the bounds of my own experience, an unbroken path which, for all I knew, was deadly—until the moment when a natural trail like that left by a snail smeared the leaves of the flowering currant that drooped around me.

Rivers cites these passages from Proust and Scott Moncrieff to indicate that both shared Krieth-Ebhart's belief that masturbation not only weakened the will, induced impotence, but could also lead to the greatest evil of all, homosexuality.

The narrator may be saying that when he was young, he considered masturbation a mortal sin. Or he may be saying that he believed the act might actually kill him and found out that it would not only when he did not die as a result. But even if masturbation is not, finally, depicted as "deadly" in the religious or the physical sense, there seem to be evocations of other harmful results that were supposed to accrue from it. Within two pages in the Pléiade edition we learn that the young narrator has a delicate constitution, flagging energy, a weak will—and is prone to masturbating. In the first upstairs room at Combray, Nord, the relationship is drawn between the act and its supposed consequence, but the narrator's attitude is not one of self-loathing. Given these personality traits and this history of masturbation, almost any physician of the era would have diagnosed the narrator as headed for homosexuality, if not afflicted by it.

I think Rivers is over-stating his case. Proust's description of masturbation—and it may have been one of the first in the history of the novel—is explicit that no one could mistake its meaning. As for Scott Moncrieff, he surpassed both Proust and Kilmartin when he talks about "paroxysms of desire". In the second case, Kilmartin has translated the original, "Vastes pièces de longtempes de refusa pour moi, sans doute, parce qu'elle était la seule où je me fus permis de fermer à clef, à toutes celles de mes occupations qui s'élevaient une inviolable solitude: la lecture, la rêverie, les larmes et la volupté." One does not know what present-day Scott Moncrieff was supposed to have "felt compelled to bowdlerize".

The references to flagging energy and weak will are surely not substantial enough to corroborate Rivers's argument, and attempts at masturbation—and the onset of menstruation, for that matter—are deeply distressing experiences, and even in our own emancipated age I doubt if they are any the less so.

Both Rivers and Splitter write with the gentility and their arguments, as a whole, are well thought out. But books are welcome additions to the great body of Proust criticism especially as their approach in no way violates their appreciation of *A la recherche du temps perdu* as an artistic masterpiece.

# A clear view of Combray

By Robert M. Adams

**MARCEL PROUST:**  
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Translated by C.K. Scott Moncrieff,  
Terence Kilmartin and Andreas  
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Chatto and Windus

A new translation of *A la recherche du temps perdu*, all million and a half words of it, is bound to raise some preliminary questions, of which the most central is probably, "What was the matter with the old translation?" Indeed, very little. The work of C.K. Scott Moncrieff has been before the public for sixty years now; he started translating even before the moribund Proust had finished composing his masterpiece, and from the start had almost as many admirers. Perhaps that fact contributed to what readers of Painter's biography will remember as the rather scratchy relations between the two men. But among those with enough of both languages to judge, there has never been a question of the merits of Scott Moncrieff's version. He carried his work through seven of the eight volumes; and though the last volume was done by different hands, the whole book has invariably been known as "Scott Moncrieff's Proust". And for sure, if the advent of a new version meant the death of the old, there would be reason to look askance at it. In fact, the old lives on substantially in the new version, providing the overwhelming majority of its materials. But for various reasons, some more and some less weighty, a revision was in order. The romantic temper of the first translator, though by no means antithetical to Proust's own, coloured his version perhaps a little too richly. Seduced by the syntax of his original, Scott Moncrieff slipped on occasion into a vein of strained and artificial English grammar. Standards of verbal accuracy have altered with the decades, and he occasionally employs euphemisms unnecessarily. Most important of all, Proust's text itself has not stood still.

Proust was never a careful corrector, either of his manuscripts, his typescripts, or his proofs; he used them all as means to enlarge and rewrite his novel, as scaffolding on which to hang new material, and trusted his editors to make things more or less accurate. With charming naïveté, he once said that the errors of his first editions were so gross, nobody could possibly suppose they were committed by the author. But editors and printers—those preparing the Nouvelle Revue Française edition, no less than those of Bernard Grasset who did the first edition of Swann's Way—were far from careless. Armed with a tangled *brochette* of scrawled-over copy, they often printed blindly what they thought they saw, whether it made sense or not; and Proust was too busy preening towards the end of his gigantic composition, which was incremental, to correct them. His method of composition, which was incremental, led to other errors which he would surely have ironed out had he had time. But the carelessness of the first volumes, which Proust at least pretended to overlook, was as nothing to that of the later books, printed after his death, which editors practically pitched together. Scott Moncrieff worked before Proust on the abominable NRF edition; it was all he had to go on. But

starting in 1954, Pierre Clarac and André Ferré began establishing for Gallimard's Pléiade library a new text, derived from scrupulous comparison of photographs, typescripts, and proof-sheets (as well as the editions), and fortified with an ample apparatus of notes and variants. The new text at once rendered obsolete not only earlier editions, but translations based on them. The present Moncrieff-Kilmartin version represents an intelligent compromise, retaining the best of the old where possible but improving it where necessary or advisable. Most of the stylistic changes seem to be due to the English editor, Terence Kilmartin; the more extensive substantive changes, plus all the added and rearranged materials, go back to Clarac and Ferré. Reproducing the full Pléiade apparatus was of course out of the question; but the new volumes include a sampling of significant new materials, in the form for each volume of an appendix of Addenda; there is also a sprinkling of unobtrusive but welcome annotations, and a useful synopsis which enables one to locate easily a remembered passage.

Clearly, many hands have contributed to the work, and there is credit enough to go around; but a special award must be granted Terence Kilmartin for arduous and devoted service in the mine-shafts of literature. Perhaps because their aim is to render their own presence imperceptible, translators tend to be classed among the drudges of the literary world. When it isn't even one's own translation, and there are 3,300 solid pages of it, self-sacrifice verges on the saintly. And each intervention is in the nature of a verbal crisis; it is a spot where an excellent translator has had to choose, where one must weigh the good one may do against the danger one might inflict.

To review properly a new translation of a new edition would require a reviewer with total recall and limitless perspectives to read Proust through four times over, in the original and revised French texts, in the original and revised English translations. That's more than can be asked of flesh and blood—of this flesh and blood, anyway. But the practical implications of the situation are simply and quickly summarized. Henceforth, there's no reason for anyone to read Proust in an English translation other than the Moncrieff-Kilmartin version. For any one already familiar with the original, Scott Moncrieff's translation, there are only marginal pleasures of rereading Proust—to study the new version. Unless you have a precise verbal memory and an extremely sharp ear for the details of prose rhythm, there are hundreds of pages where, without word-for-word comparison, you would be hard put to tell one version from the other. Some major variations are found in the later books; in the earlier ones, except for occasional nuances of tone (where frequently the translators, equally faithful, are faithful to different elements of the original), the versions are very close indeed. Irregularly spaced, of course, the modifications probably average about three to five per page.

Kilmartin sees as in need of correction his predecessor's fondness for the precious word and the purple patch, as well as his occasional failure to extricate himself completely from the coils of French syntax. The remedy of both blemishes is the same: greater simplicity and directness in the prose. A few details will illustrate. Scott Moncrieff attributes to the asparagus that Françoise is preparing a "rainbow-coloured" quality. What Proust wrote was "bauchées d'arc-en-ciel"; so the homonym is divided—there is no "lovely" quality of *bauchées*, but finding the proper light touch in English is perhaps impossible. Again, Proust writes, "Le past n'est pas fugace; il reste assés présent." Scott Moncrieff translates, "The past is not fugitive; it stays to." "The past is not fugitive; it stays

put"—a clear improvement. Scott Moncrieff has a fondness for "albeit", which Kilmartin regularly reduces to "although" or "though". Scott Moncrieff uses, for Proust's expressive "muffle", variations on "caddish" or "like a cad". Kilmartin avoids the moral disdain and gains precision by translating "boorishly" or "rudely". The hawthorns at Tansonville are described by Scott Moncrieff as

holding out each its little bunch of glittering stamens with an air of inattention, fine, radiating "nerves" in the flamboyant style of architecture, like those which, in church, framed the stair to the roof-loft or closed the perpendicular tracery of the windows, but here spread out into pools of fleshy white, like strawberry-beds in spring.

Kilmartin cuts back a little and tightens up; the trees held out each its little bunch of glittering stamens with an absent-minded air, delicate radiating veins which, in the church, framed the stairway to the roof-loft or the mullions of the windows, and blossomed out into the fleshy whiteness of strawberry flowers.

Here it will be seen by comparison with the original (Pléiade, I, 138) that Kilmartin has been both deferential and subtle in allowing the two parts of the chapter's flowers comparison to grow imperceptibly together, syntactically as well as through its imagery.

Changes of this magnitude, it will be appreciated, amount to very little when considered individually; it's mainly in the later volumes that the new version, based on a new text, starts to present occasional nuisances as a paragraph or two in size that were not to be found in the older translation. (Among the Addenda to Volume II, there is a striking and extended passage in which the Baron de Charlus, infatuated with an ugly, coarse, and ignorant bus conductor, repeatedly rebuffs the overtures of the Princesse de Guermantes, with the result that she tries to poison herself. The passage is alluded to in the established text of the novel, but never found a place there.) And yet the cumulative effect of the detailed changes would alone justify the changes in the new version. In keeping with modern standards of plain, uncluttered prose, they cut down on the soft Proust and bring out the hard Proust, who was there all along, no more the "real" Proust than his counterpart, but better adapted to modern tastes and, perhaps, to Proust's new position in literary history. Reflections on these matters are the inevitable fruit of a re-reading of the novel—which, if it isn't morally obligatory might well use the new version as a welcome pretext.

Nobody would be more alive than Proust himself to the ironies that spring from a repeated reading, under different circumstances, with different eyes and feelings, of the same text. To lapse for a moment into the personal, but with canonical authority: "In reality," says Proust, "every reader is while he is reading, the reader of his own self."—my own reading of his novel goes back nearly if not altogether fifty years. About the time of that first reading, my family was in Europe for a long time, and their roots being partly aristocratic, I could sense through their contacts something of the old world which he had only half discarded. It was a flavour the more pronounced because it touched my senses so lightly, so briefly; from such an immense distance, I recall meeting, in the Hague, a severely, massively courteous old Swedish baron; there was brief talk of his younger brother, who had suffered an obscure and fatal misfortune—I only know what was decades later, from the film *Elvira Madigan*. My mother, who took her genealogy only less seriously than the Duc de Guermantes, of all "mere" translations) to be able to make contact with some of the sprawling and ancient family of De la Gardie, with whom her own family of Teutonic knights were somehow—in ways not

really to be explained by the quarterings on the family crest—intriguingly allied. There was talk of visiting their seat, somewhere in Occitania, but I don't think anything ever came of it. In these and other ways, it was possible for someone born during the First World War, and in a culture as alien as New York City, to grow up with a sense of Proust's world as only a moment and a step away—to feel that Proust's nostalgia for an age of peace, plenty, and deference had somehow been extended to oneself, that in fact he was really a contemporary writer.

Another ambiguous and subtle bond with Proust was his Jewishness, an affinity all the more binding for not being explicit—one aspect of which was perhaps a secret sense of pride at having some access to "good" society but scoring to make use of it. One of my college contemporaries wrote some years ago of having been an "artificial Jew". It was a frequent experience of the 1930s; some of us, to adopt the words of the chronicler, became "more Jewish than the Jews themselves". To "pass" in the reverse direction was a matter of pride. I recall once being called away from a conversation with my best friend, son of the rabbi of Weehawken, because a fellow student wanted to invite me to pledge a Jewish fraternity, and didn't want to do so in the presence of "that gentile". And to this sense of a private and vital social outcast (private merely in the sense of dismissing external marks and official distinctions with the wary outsider's wit and cynical intelligence to which we at least aspired), Proust lent his example. (I don't think we were similarly impressed with his homosexuality, nor am I much impressed by it to this day. Proust seems to me a man addicted to love, not to any particular expression of it; the long essay on the "men of Sodom" at the beginning of *Sodom et Gomorrah* is one of the flattest and most extraneous passages of the book.)

Well, then, if one grew up taking Proust as an accomplice to one's own fantasies, the passage of fifty years must work remarkable changes in one's relation to the book; and so, of course, it has. As age brings out the basic structure of a well-known face, stripping off the soft contours to reveal that sparse, angular framework of bone which may have an energy of its own, so Proust with the years reveals himself more and more as a moralist in the severe, sententious vein of the seventeenth century. Beckett, with his special appetite for despair and futility, would reduce Proust's logic to a diagram of his own stark nihilism; but the mere dimensions of Proust's work are a million and a half words to learn that all knowledge is vain and all affection futile. Proust is interested in law: he said so. "There is a feeling for general-ity which, in the future writer, itself picks out what is general and can for that reason one day enter into a work of art." He writes axioms, aphorisms for the memory. These axioms of Proust are mostly stilet in their tonality; like those of Montaigne, or for that matter Madame de Sévigné, they focus on the conduct and management of the affections. That is why there are so many of them; they grow out of, and even depart far from, the concrete business of life. But behind diversity they seek, and often discover, the one reason why there is so little change in Proust is that there is so little change in the world. The world makes very little difference what species of his and ours played in all of it. (Sometimes in the name of "love", sometimes more frankly in the name of "fate".) The novel, tamed, I recall meeting, in the Hague, a severely, massively courteous old Swedish baron; there was brief talk of his younger brother, who had suffered an obscure and fatal misfortune—I only know what was decades later, from the film *Elvira Madigan*. My mother, who took her genealogy only less seriously than the Duc de Guermantes, of all "mere" translations) to be able to make contact with some of the sprawling and ancient family of De la Gardie, with whom her own family of Teutonic knights were somehow—in ways not

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## commentary

### Sectional interests

By T. J. Binyon

The First Deadly Sin  
Ritz Cinema, Leicester Square

Brian Hutton's film opens with some savage cross-cutting between scenes in a hospital operating theatre and on a New York street at night. A surgeon's scalpel carves a patient open in close-up; on the street a homicidal maniac beats his victim to death with an ice-axe. A crucifix on the wall of the operating theatre echoes a neon cross outside a Baptist chapel in the street. In other words, we are in for blood, but also significance.

The patient on the table, having an infected kidney removed, is Barbara Delaney (Faye Dunaway), wife of Sergeant Edward X. Delaney (Frank Sinatra) of the NYPD, who is just coming up for his pension. Assigned to the murder, Delaney begins to suspect that it is one of a series, but his precinct captain (Anthony Zerbe), obsessed with running a tight ship, doesn't want to know. So Delaney puts together a scratch team, consisting of a cynical police surgeon - well played by James Whitmore - a retired museum curator (Martin Gabel) and the widow of one of the victims (Brenda Vaccaro). With the customary serendipity of amateurs, they come up with the murderer: Daniel Blank (David Dukes), a young WASP executive, who really is nuttier than several fruit cakes.

Since the law seems slow to exact vengeance, Delaney sets it aside. He blows Blank away with a Luger, hands in his papers, and sits by his wife's hospital bed, reading to her *Honey Bunch*. Her first days in camp (a children's story of such glutinous sentimentality that one could hang wallpaper with it), until she gives up the ghost.

The film is based on an over-long novel with the same name by Lawrence Sanders. Most of the changes the film

makes are for the better. An embarrassing sub-plot dealing with the vampire-like Celia Montfort, her beautiful teenage brother and their epinec man servant - a household which causes Blank to flip his lid in the first place - has been omitted. In the book Delaney is a captain, but here he's been busted down to sergeant; quite right, too, for Sinatra is much better at portraying authority at this level. It's sad, though, to see him wheedling information out of a snotty doorman with a winning smile and a twenty dollar bill, instead of, as would have been the case earlier, banging it out of him against a wall. One regrets the loss of only one episode from the book for its pleasantly anthropophagous overtones: taken to a chophouse by the police surgeon to discuss head wounds in detail, Delaney orders and consumes with enjoyment a broiled kidney, a day or two after his wife has lost hers.

Brian Hutton doesn't use Hitchcock's blood-on-the-daisies technique, the startling introduction of the horrific into the everyday, but keeps the two rigidly apart. Half of the film belongs to realism: the police station, Delaney's apartment, the hospital ward; the other half - Blank's apartment, the streets at night with sinister steam seeping up through the manhole covers - to the horror movie. And for all the cutting between the two, a technique used as subtly as Blank uses his ice-axe, no connexion is established. So much so, that when Delaney enters Blank's apartment to make the pinch, credibility - never particularly in evidence - evaporates completely.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the film is poor Faye Dunaway's fate. She spends the whole film lying on her back in a hospital bed with plastic tubing up her nose, growing yellow and yellow as she listens to the adventures of Honey Bunch. It can't have been a pleasant experience, but, on consideration, it might be marginally preferable to seeing the film for a second time.

### Citizen Hughes

By Richard Combs

Melvin and Howard  
Screen on the Green and Gaiety One Cinemas

*Melvin and Howard* is a gift of a subject - and the pity is that the director, Jonathan Demme, has scarcely got beyond the wrapping. The title suggests another buddy-cum-road-movie in the familiar American vein, and the opening is true to this type. Good-hearted, ever-optimistic Melvin Dummar - who might be Horatio Alger out West - is driving through the Nevada desert at night when he comes upon an old man who has had an accident on his motorcycle. He gives this apparent down-and-out a lift. Insists that he join in a song he has composed and sent to Hollywood for scoring, and finally lets him off in Las Vegas, after graciously conceding that if the old man wants to claim he is Howard Hughes, most mythical of self-made men, that is his business.

Howard thereupon disappears from the picture; and we take off on a quick jog through Melvin's efforts to make the same dream of success come true. He has an on-off marriage with Lydia (a delightful performance by Mary Steenburgen), sweats and hustles his way to the glades of "Million of the Month", but never seems to get more than a step ahead of the "repo" (repossession) men. Eventually he is married to someone else and working in a gas station when a sleek black car pulls into his life and leaves him with Howard Hughes's last will and testament, naming him a beneficiary. Melvin is presented with his dream on a platter - except that, in a moment of clear-sightedness, he realizes that it is just not possible. He tries to shufle the will out of sight. When it is rediscovered, the media and legal culture

descend, and through the subsequent inquest Melvin seems good-naturedly to accept that he will never see the money. The will is thrown out of court. Melvin's real joy, the film suggests, lies in his memory of the time when he and Howard Hughes shared a song together.

The sentimentality of this moment might have been less apparent - or it might have registered more as a pleasant irony - if the film had been less content to coast on the surface of its subject. Melvin and Howard are the polar extremes of the American Success Story, and Demme has quite sensibly decided not to unbalance the equation by making more of Hughes as a character. But his canter through Melvin's life, a succession of tiny scenes, is too restricted in tone and too pedestrian in style to encompass any hint of the spirit of Hughes, the lure of his unreal materialism, and the rather movie-ish fantasy which he made of his life (a movie already made by Orson Welles; perhaps, in *Citizen Kane*).

Television images feeding the American Dream are a significant element of *Melvin and Howard*. Melvin forces Lydia to enter "The Golden Gate" game show with her tap-dance routine, earning them \$10,000 which Melvin immediately squanders in conspicuous consumption. Much later, after the delivery of the will, we see newsclips of the real Hughes, engaged in such fantasy enterprises as an attempt to take off in his flying albatross. But these two sets of images have no resonance; beyond their immediate satirical point and Demme misses the connections he might have made even were left simply with Melvin's part of the story: a mildly enjoyable, comic-strip poplar rags-to-riches simply summed up in the quest for appearance of Melvin Dummar himself.

### Domestic wars

By Lindsay Duguid

Together Against Him  
York and Albany Theatre, Camden Town

*Together Against Him* is set in Belfast in 1973, and in a London Fringe currently suffering from the absence of *Time Out*, the necessary siege atmosphere is not hard to conjure up. The required setting of a shabby front parlour is also readily achieved in the York and Albany Theatre, which consists of a room above a pub in Camden Town. As with many fringe productions, the slightly uneasy direction and sometimes less-than-word-perfect actors triumph over adversity by their passionate commitment to a very good text.

Philomena Muirner's play is about a Belfast family coping as best it can with a normality that entails avoiding taking the same route twice, avoiding certain streets and obeying rules ("women are less likely targets than lads like you"). Loud noises startle, stories of knockings and murders are commonplace and you jump at the sound of the telephone or doorbell ("They didn't use the code"). The family also endures the less dramatic effects of the war: poverty (sausages for supper again and go easy on the tea bags), bad housing (the lavatory is broken), obsession with the past, provincial prejudice and mental illness (the mother, "like half the housewives in

### Into that good night

By Robert Hewison

Going Gently  
BBC TV

The pairing of Fulton Mackay and Norman Wisdom in a hospital play might, in Mackay's case, raise hopes of hilarious institutional comedy, and in Wisdom's case, lower them with the prospect of winsome pathos. Both expectations are wrong: this is an angry drama about death and dying, and the only real joke in *Going Gently* is the title.

Mackay and Wisdom are coupled by the blind administrative fate that puts two patients with terminal cancer in the same ward cubicle to die together. Mackay, articulate with Scots linguistic aggression, plays Professor Miller; Wisdom is Flood, the more conventional retired salesman. But all men wear the same shifts in hospital, and these social differences hardly matter. What matters is their attitude to dying. Mackay, the senior occupant of their glass-walled cubicle, meets the prospect of death with willful disobedience: unable to break the hospital rules, he breaks the hospital rules with whisky and tranquility. Wisdom reads more predictably, oscillating between disbelief and collapse, but he learns from Mackay. Such peace as there is between them is kept by a ward sister, Judi Dench.

Within the hell jar of the cubicle, we watch the pressures of fear, pain and fury shift back and forth between Wisdom and Mackay during the weeks in which they wait to die. The dying itself is a stinking, retching, business, and only Mackay's anger sustains them both to the end. Not that Mackay is shown in any way to be nobler; there is a horrifying scene in which he pours blood-red tomato juice all over the pages of a family album, brought in by Wisdom's wife. The wife is ed away hysterical, and Mackay knocks back the drugs of juce

the town", has to resort to Valium. This family, however, is also unhappy in its own particular way. The American father, who has left them voluntarily settled in Ulster, believes that his children might become spoilt by the faded decadence of America. He is a professor at the University and thus represents the faint hope of a better life in the innocence of America ("You could walk the streets in America") and the resources of literature, art and music. The three teenage children are torn between him and their mother who, having struggled free from her Belfast background, is prepared to fight to the death for her religion and for the virtues of keeping things nice, believing above all in the power of education, bettering yourself and feminism: "Repeat after me," she tells her daughter, "I am a woman. I have drive and energy." The children, who already show signs of brutalization, are quarrelsome, deceitful and adept at avoiding trouble. Events come to a head when there is a threat that their father (who is about to marry a Dublin girl) will withdraw his financial support. The children are encouraged by their mother to unite against him and to make him admit (by a combination of "challenge" and "boycott") his responsibilities, but he skilfully evades the issue.

Although the play may be seen as a contemporary political allegory, it is also a demonstration of more timeless problems of divided loyalties, conflict and hatred. The writing is naturalistic with a leavening of jokes - both bitter and funny - and the mother, played by Annie Hayes, is a masterpiece of characterization.

with the manic satisfaction of man who has communicated all the irrational agony of his situation.

The purpose of *Going Gently* is contained in that scene. It is to show what death can be like, in a manner that a documentary would be too discreet to do.

Though skilful in its suggestion of a whole hospital world outside the ward, *Inside* Lloyd and Stephen Frears' production is less subtle in its use of caricature minor roles - the night nurse, the priest - to throw our sympathies towards the leading trio of Mackay, Wisdom and Dench. The play itself is an adaptation by Thomas Ellice from a novel by the American Robert Downs, although the presumed transposition from Medicare to National Health is unnoticable. After the dying, there is the death: not with a bang, but not with a whimper.

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## commentary

### Title deeds

By Nicholas Shrimpton

The Skin Game  
Richmond Theatre

In 1920 Galsworthy's title was a piece of current, and evidently shocking, slang. Even in the first act, where the phrase retains its traditional sense of familiarity recalls when he hears it the lips of his daughter. By the final curtain the words have moved beyond his generalized meaning to a specific connection with prize-fighting. "What is it that gets loose when you begin a fight, and makes you what you think you're not?" asks that same father. "Begin as you may, it ends in this - skin game."

Few of Galsworthy's titles, of course, have this degree of mystery to them. His fellow writers of domestic problem plays presented their dramatized dilemmas beneath discreetly non-committal labels. Granville Barker was monosyllabically explicit only once, with *Waste* in 1907. St John Hankin was ironic even in such apparently open titles as *The Constant Star* and *The Return of the Prodigal*. Characteristically both men gave their intellectual wares an intriguing and understated wrapping. Plays called *The Madras House*, *The Voyage of Inheritance* or *The Cassilis Engagement* could easily have been farces or melodramas. The titles hint rather than tell.

Galsworthy suffered from no such inhibition. Throughout his twenty years in the theatre he pressed ideas upon audiences with a positively evangelical enthusiasm. *Sinful* is about sin, *Loyalties* about loyalties, *Justice* about justice. Even *The Silver Boy* (1911) and *The Eldest Son* present their central exhibit with a clarity and determination which make it hard to forget their author's early training as a barrister. And, having once decided to treat the jury as idiots, Galsworthy is then able to change his tone. Theme is not merely announced, it is echoed and re-echoed. Curtains fall upon symbolic tableaux. Verbal repetitions and dramatic irony hammer home the points. The effect is the dramatic equivalent of shouting into a hearing aid.

Yet the curious thing about this theatrical manner is that it is simultaneously insistent and indecisive. Frank Swinnerton observed in 1935 that Galsworthy was "too modest to be severe". The judgement accurately reflects his tendency to present problems rather than answers. *Justice* might seem an exception, since it is one of the few plays known to have produced an immediate social reform (Winston Churchill, as Home Secretary, was so moved when he saw it in 1910 that he abolished the indiscriminate use of penal solitary confinement). But even



A scene from Tom Robertson's play Ours (1866), one of the illustrations in Clive Swift's *The Performing World of the Actor* (114pp, Hamish Hamilton, £5.95, 0 241 10585 4), just published.

*Justice* depicts a criminal who is legitimately convicted and permits a generous interpretation of his accusers' motives. The plays which address themselves to larger topics than the law are still more resolutely even-handed. The plot of *The Skin Game* is a small campaign in the class war. Country gentfolk condescend to a newly arrived self-made man. He, in return, threatens to build factory chimneys outside their windows. Protracted financial and social skirmishes eventually lead to an embittered stand-off. It would be a wise audience, however, which emerged from the theatre with a clear sense of which side the author was on. The middle classes are brutal but cruelly provoked. The aristocrats are scrupulous only as long as their interests are unthreatened. Galsworthy offers neither a preference nor an alternative.

Class warfare, in other words, provides the plot rather than the theme of *The Skin Game*. For theme, as always, see title - and we are left with common-sense itself. The bare-knuckle instinct, the self-generating power of hatred, is the subject of the play; the social detail is merely its surface. Quarrels, Galsworthy suggests, are best left unstated. Why they start, how they may be stopped, and who should win them remain urgent but insoluble questions.

Strident uncertainty of this kind is not a note to which the contemporary

British theatre is accustomed. Problems should be obscure, or they should be neatly attended with solutions. Problems as problems are a forgotten theatrical interest, a stylistic foreign country which can easily induce failure of nerve. Someone's nerve has clearly failed in Clifford Williams' production of *The Skin Game*. Taking a large campaign on the road with three productions in repertory (*The Devil's Disciple* and *The Cherry Orchard* are the companion pieces) is a difficult business. But it is not a practical difficulty which sinks *The Skin Game*, it is a difficulty of style.

These actors perform a problem play without realizing what it is they are handling, and end up offering something best described as drawing-room tragedy. Dark memories of Agatha Christie played in weekly repertory at the best of times, and Bernard Shaw's nagging almost destroys the tension of Galsworthy's most daring piece of unconventional stagecraft, the public auction. Throughout, the strenuous realism is sapped by the careless treatment of period detail and the cherished dilemmas are trampled in the rush.

Two small parts and two large provide something to shore against these ruins. Robert Aldous is a dogged Dawker. Jonathan Coy, as Rolf Hornblower, fills his tiny cameo with an authentic sense of the man marooned between social classes. On a larger scale

Anthony Quayle plays Hornblower Senior, the intrusive bourgeois, with his characteristic pace and precision. But theatrical lions should not feel obliged to imitate their counterparts in the zoological gardens. Quayle wanders up and down the stage with the febrile restlessness of a caged beast, destroying some of his best effects in the process. There were moments when I wouldn't have blamed him if he'd wandered out of the French windows and not come back. But as long as he decides to stay in the building he should try a little standing still.

Object lessons in this respect, as in most others, may be taken from Goshie Withers, who seems to have forgotten more about the playing of Galsworthy than the rest of the cast will ever learn. She has an instinctive mastery of the language and manners of an Amy Fillerist. But, more important than that, she also knows that *The Skin Game* is meant to be a sequence of controversial moral decisions and shows us those decisions being made. Her broken monologue of "I don't understand", as Mrs Fillerist's assumptions are finally thrown into doubt, is one of the few moments when this halting production shows signs of theatrical life.

Even with half a dozen performances as good as hers, of course, it would not be easy to persuade modern audiences to like *The Skin Game*. Galsworthy the playwright is an earnest, earnest English lineite without either poetry or wit, and his characterization has that peculiar sawn-off quality which comes from the subordination of personality to theme. T.W. Robertson, with his one-word thematic titles and cup-and-saucer realism, is his true master (the characters in *The Eldest Son* are rehearsing for an amateur production of *Caste*) and it's sometimes possible to wonder whether the forty year gap between them produced any advance in dramatic technique at all. The best vehicle for a Galsworthy revival might, in fact, be the early play *Joy*, where the uncharacteristic ambiguity of the title itself suggests that the author is allowing more scope than usual to the people of the play. Joy, at first merely a reference to the name of a character, eventually becomes a tacit statement of the (surprising) theme of sexual fulfillment. A production which found a way of coping with the rural whimsy of the first few pages could do a lot with the rest, for Galsworthy's reputation. But it would need to be a good deal better than this production of *The Skin Game*.

Understated, abrasive, and accurate in its funny first act, *Love Bites* becomes melodramatic and sentimentally blurred in its duller second one. For all the sexual authenticity, it is founded on a romantic cliché: the lives of its two girls are ravaged for ever by the heartbreak of first love that failed. The novelistic nature of this is here camouflaged by outstandingly vivid performances, convincing to the last detail of intonation and posture, from Kay Adesh and Rosalind Adler. And the women are given an added dimension by being viewed from two different angles. Alone in monologue, they are one side of themselves. In company, through dialogue, they show another. The men, on the other hand, are allowed no inner life. Flat and synthetic, they are merely plastic monstrosities from the rooster, and blunder into a second feminist bestiality (snaky lecher, woolly bear hug-you-to-death husband, quick-on-the-hoof deserters).

Stereotype collides oddly with originality in achievement, as well as technique. *Love Bites* is prone to striking contrasts.

### Two by two

By Peter Kemp

Love Bites  
ICA

Contrasts and parallels provide the framework for Susan Hawes's new play, *Love Bites*. Socially, its two main characters are poles apart. Creamily self-possessed Joanna is upper-middle-class; Susan, bubbling with self-mockery, is working-class. Joanna comes from the Home Counties, went to Roedean, took a good degree at Cambridge; Susan comes from Manchester, went to the local Grammar, and dropped out from teachers' training college. Joanna has a tasteful flat near Primrose Hill and a prosperous job with J. Walter Thompson; Susan rents a seamy room in Finsbury Park, works in a canteen by day, and, in the evenings, as an usherette. Alternating between these two girls, the play both contrasts and compares them - for they have one thing immediately in common: each has advertised in *Time Out*'s lonely hearts column.

The first act concentrates on the blind dates that come from this. In a wine-bar, Joanna negotiates her way through a hilariously hopeless

encounter with a gauche LSE student. Adroitly playing off barbed suavity against raw gawdiness, *Love Bites* here achieves a cruelly funny counterpoint - as it also does when, in a pub, Susan meets her man, an amiable heap of sound-engineering jargon and beery bonhomie bemusedly transfixed by her spiky nervousness.

Sardonically observing these brief encounters, the play is excellent. Deftly, embarrassed and embarrassing, its very strong cast don't miss a gaffe. Then, in the second act, things start to go astray. Intelligent, witty comedy, sparked off by shrewd social and psychological notation, disappears behind a cloudy generalization about men's treatment of women. In support of this, resemblances between the two girls now hectically accumulate. Joanna's first experience of love-making was a physical fiasco; Susan's, an emotional one. Susan's first lover, pointedly jettisoned here, making the point more starkly, Joanna's third, being viewed from two different angles. Alone in monologue, they are one side of themselves. In company, through dialogue, they show another. The men, on the other hand, are allowed no inner life. Flat and synthetic, they are merely plastic monstrosities from the rooster, and blunder into a second feminist bestiality (snaky lecher, woolly bear hug-you-to-death husband, quick-on-the-hoof deserters).

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Oxford University Press







## The prison-cell detective

By John Spurling

**JORGE LUIS BORGES and ADOLFO BLOY-CASARES:**  
*Six Problems for Don Isidro Parodi*  
Translated by Norman Thomas di Giovanni  
160pp. Allen Lane. £5.95.  
0 7139 1421 1

Borges first met Adolfo Bloy-Casares in 1930, when Bloy was sixteen and Borges, who had already published three books of poems, three books of essays and a biography, thirty-one. Borges has called his friendship with Bloy "one of the chief events of my life," and added with characteristic modesty:

When we began to work together, Bloy was really and secretly the master... Opposing my taste for the pathetic, the sentimental, and the baroque, Bloy made me feel that quietness and restraint are more desirable.

Bloy appears under his own name in the early story *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius* — one of Borges's crucial transitions between writing essays and fiction — as the friend with whom the narrator discovers the existence of the mysterious land of Uqbar. Soon afterwards the two friends collaborated on a set of detective stories which was published in 1942 as *Six Problems for Don Isidro Parodi* by B. Bustos Domecq; and they used this pseudonym again for further collaborative stories which appeared only in magazines or were privately printed.

*Six Problems* contains precious little evidence of Bloy's taste for quietness and restraint, unless it is in the character of Parodi himself, an ex-berber serving a long prison sentence for a murder he didn't commit and forced to listen to the elaborate Browningsque monologues of a series of excitable visitors to his cell. Parodi is the *me plus ultra* of the intellectual sleuth, his sections more or less confined to brewing himself a cup of *mate* and reading newspapers, his characteristics to being "sententious and fat", with a shaved head and "unusually wise eyes", and his speech to occasional questions along the way and a brisk unravelling of the mystery at the end of each story. Whether or not these unravellings or bits of what actually happened reflect Bloy's influence on Borges, they now read as the most Borgesian parts of the book, comparable in method, though

not in resonance, to the stories in *The Garden of Forking Paths*, first published a year before *Six Problems* but incorporated in 1944 into *Ficciones* (Borges's bibliography is nearly as labyrinthine as his plots). As Borges wrote in his prologue to *The Garden of Forking Paths*, "the composition of vast books is a laborious and impoverishing extravagance... A better course of procedure is to pretend that these books already exist, and then to offer a résumé, a commentary." But in *Six Problems* Parodi's slim résumés are preceded by the prolix explanations of those involved in the crime and it is the predominance of these other voices, these extra, deliberately ridiculous and unreliable narrators, which makes the book both laborious and extravagant.

The original idea for *Six Problems* seems to have been Bloy's. At any rate Borges has him propounding it at the beginning of *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*: Bloy Casares had dined with me that night and talked to us at length about a great scheme for writing a novel in the first person, using a narrator who omitted or corrupted what happened and who ran into various contradictions, so that only a handful of readers, a very small handful, would be able to decipher the horrible or banal reality behind the novel.

With the addition of the prison-cell detective to stand in for the small handful of alert readers, the formula is complete and must have looked promising, given that either of the collaborators had a gift for dramatic monologue. On the evidence of this book, neither had, and although Bloy may have made better attempts elsewhere (I have not read his solo works), Borges has steered clear of characterized monologue in all his later work; indeed he has tended to avoid characterization altogether. His characters do not aspire to be individuals with a sense of interior life but types (the traitor, the Jew, the theologian, the gaucho) or

entries in encyclopaedias (Herbert Ashe, Dr Brodie).

The monologues in *Six Problems* are types — the leading actor, the small-time crook, etc. — with a satirical dimension. They are meant, as well as unwittingly corrupting the truth of what has happened, to point up certain absurdities in pre-war Argentinian society. It is hard for an English reader forty years later to assess their accuracy, but they come across as overdone, absurd at two removes, as if the authors had satirized conventional Aunt Sallies instead of the actual people around them. The difficulty for English readers living in Britain is compounded by the translator's North American idiom. Norman Thomas di Giovanni has done much to naturalize and demystify Borges's work in English, especially the later, plainer tales, but the Parodi stories are a tissue of old-fashioned mannerisms and cannot be partly re-textured into mainly up-to-date American. To take one small example: the sentence "From this morning poetry, I was suddenly yanked into the prose of life by a knock at my door", put in the mouth of a flowery old actor, destroys such consistency and credibility as the actor has by making him puncture his own style. The only monologue that achieves steady conviction in this idiom is, obviously enough, the small-time crook's.

The book's dust-jacket claims that "these stories are an essential key to the world of Borges developed as a writer." That is certainly true. They belong to his most fertile period, when the provincial poet and man of letters was evolving into one of the most original and entertaining storytellers of our time and they help to define the talent as well as the limitations of his nature. But they are strictly for a very small handful of readers, the Borges freaks. As detective stories they are too far-fetched, as satire too clumsy, and as literature too trivial.

Until the mother publishes her own memoir, it will be hopeless to try to disentangle fact from fiction. For what at one point sounds like a hilarious satire of American junk culture, at another sounds like self-satire. The loathing shifts remorselessly to self-loathing. The title derives from Swift: "When a true genius appears in the world, you may know him by this sign, that the dunces are all in confederacy against him." That must have been John Kennedy Toole speaking. (Ed Lindoff's jacket illustration is clearly based on Toole's photograph.) For he committed suicide in 1969, at the age of thirty-two, depressed at his failure to get the novel published.

That suppressed "true genius" was his own. Who else is the mock-hero of this fiction? Who else this grotesque pasha, this southern Obolomov yallowing in his flannel nightshirt in a back bedroom in New Orleans? This lumbering, bloated, belching, hypochondriac slob who is literally a weight round his mother's neck? Mercilessly Ignatius J. Reilly tyrannizes over his mother. Relentlessly he manipulates everyone by his monumental sloth and size. A true southerner of the old school, he rants against the modern world. A royalist and medievalist at heart, he yearns for the luminous age of Alfred and Thomas à Becket. Boethius, *De Consolatione*, Herodotus and Batman are his guides as he swings up and down — mostly down — the cycles of Fortuna.

This inert blob of domesticated tissue (like the hero of Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer*, 1963) is compulsively drawn to movies, greedily studying the credits for performers, assistant producers, even hair designers that had previously roused his loathing, nauseating himself on close-ups, inspecting smiles for cavities and fillings. A purulent mess, he seeks out his mirror image in the world. His gloating lust is all expended on the movies and TV (that hang-up was all too true of the 1950s and early 60s), while he lashes out at homosexuals, homosexuals, Protestants, "newspaper reporters, strip-teasers, birds, pornography, juvenile delinquents, Nazi pornography." He dreams of terrorizing the white proletariat.

The Negro, terrorized simply by being himself, is however, must browbeat a bit in order to achieve the same end. Perhaps I should have been a Negro. I suspect that I would have been a rather large and terrifying one, continually preying my ample thigh against the withered thighs of old white ladies in public conveyances, a great deal, and eliciting more than one shriek of panic.

This man, mountain of heaving fat, all lethargy and rancour, is a wholly novel compound, both racialist and, with his

## Appearance of genius

By Harold Beaver

**JOHN KENNEDY TOOLE:**  
*A Confederacy of Dunces*  
338pp. Allen Lane. £7.95.  
0 7139 1422 X

"For sheer pleasure," Osbert Lancaster observed, "few methods of progression can compare with the perambulation. The motion is agreeable, the range of vision extensive, and one has always before one's eyes the rewarding spectacle of a grown-up maintaining prolonged physical exertion." Above all, there is the pasha-like power of infants, derived from the mere act of jettisoning a teddy-bear or rattle, that can readily quell any tendency of grown-ups to incoherence.

Ignatius J. Reilly, of *A Confederacy of Dunces*, is just such an infant, inflated to grotesque dimensions. Like Ignatius, his author too had apparently been still living with his mother at the age of thirty. It was Thelma D. Toole who relentlessly hawked her son's manuscript, which had been unanimously rejected in the 1960s, until she elicited an enthusiastic commendation from Walker Percy. John Kennedy Toole's posthumous fiction was finally published last year by the Louisiana State University Press. To a universal chorus of praise. It is a masterpiece.

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gargantuan farts, and melancholy as melancholy Jacques, and coyly girly as Oliver Hardy, inflated with gas, when his psychic valve snaps shut, he bumbles and floats into disaster-prone, knockabout regions of purgatory, like another Pygmalion.

But Ignatius is not the only memorable character. There is also a supporting cast of zany patrolmen, bag-men, night-club proprietors, hustlers, tripsters, queers, Jewish industrialists, black vagrants, hot-dog vendors and female militants crisscrossing the city streets to the suburbs, from the Mississippi, Bourbon, Royal, Charles, St. Peter, Dumaine: all the lovely names of the Quarter resound. All the scenes resound: of the black spivs, the *flirt* queers, "the German and Irish Third Ward". Mark Twain himself might have saluted such an achievement. A spirit of revelry, of Mardi Gras, looms over all as Ignatius (now a hot-dog vendor), an Italian patrolman, a Negro doorman and a variety of homosexuals wander about the Quarter in festive drag.

The plot itself is explosively inventive. Again and again I burst out laughing. But it must be remembered that something like a twenty year gap divides this text from the 1980s. *The Sister Carrie*, *A Confederacy of Dunces* has reached us after a long and painful detour. John Kennedy Toole himself died in 1969, a year of still and rejuvenation. His novel is still rooted in an earlier decade of snug, shy, quiet seclusion — of verbal sabotage from the dark womb of cinema, family ballrooms, bars, bus terminals, rest-rooms, or Rousseau, but very little that was persuasive, even helpful, on that considerable body of second-rank (though by no means second-rate) eighteenth-century writers who had interesting political ideas of their own. Carl Becker's plausible and popular *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers*, first published in 1932 and still, after over twenty years, in print, struck me (and still strikes me) as clever and perverse, owing its reputation, and its readership, to its brevity, its wit, its glibness and its revisionism: the *philosophes*, Becker argued, were really medieval philosophers in modern dress, rationalists on the model of Thomas Aquinas, absurdly hopeful about the future, and egregiously unhistorical.

In the spring of 1956, I had an opportunity to express my opinion about Becker's little joke on the Enlightenment in the presence of his mercurial pupils and admirers. But meanwhile I had been at work. If no had done justice to the political ideas in the age of the Enlightenment, I would do so myself: I envisioned, and laid out, a row of three volumes, each containing six substantial essays on writers like Diderot and Holbach, Lessing and Wieland, Hume and Ferguson. Enjoying a year off at Princeton in 1955-56, I decided to initiate my

None of the pedants in power, of course, will be practical enough to know about such devices as bombs (these nuclear weapons would lie rotting in their vaults somewhere. From time to time the Chief of Staff, the President, and so on, dressed in sequins and feathers, will entertain the leaders, i.e., the pervers, of the other countries at balls and parties. Quarrels of any sort could easily be straightened out in the great room of the redecorated United Nations.

But this Satyricon of disguises and depravities and chance encounters necessarily moves to a comic resolution. The mother remarries; the Jewish proprietor returns to his factory; the psychobabbling wife is worried; the stripper hits the big time; the bag-lady is retired; Ignatius is rescued by his activist college girl-friend. The justice of the trail turns out to be wholly beneficial. This cosmic buffoon on the prowl — the obese onanism — turns out to be the trickster hero of the Carnival City. The anarchy that surrounds him is relative and mysteriously creative.

As Ignatius drags his girl out of the front door, she asks: "Don't you want to pack anything?" Oh, of course! He recalls: "There are a few of my notes and jottings. We must never let them fall into the hands of my mother. She would make a fortune from them. I would be too ironic." Just how ironic John Kennedy Toole himself was never to know.

A review of the American edition of *A Confederacy of Dunces* appeared in the TLS of July 18 1980.

## SECOND THOUGHTS

This is the first of an occasional series of articles in which distinguished writers have been invited to reassess or reflect on one of their own works.

Somewhat to my surprise, the TLS's invitation to revisit one of my books plunged me into a state of consternation. There is something about a memory; there is something about a manuscript, repeatedly revised, meticulously edited, that is then set in type by trade-union printers, sent out to reviewers — and even occasionally recollected to work. For a time I hesitated, not whether to accept, but which book to choose. That beautiful Platonic conceit, my books are my children, would not leave me: my children, would not leave me: my children, would not leave me. Head of a *famille nombreuse*, I love them all equally, with all their flaws. But then a favourite emerged, because it recalled a dramatic moment — a secular epiphany, that I have very rarely experienced in more than two decades of writing and publishing since.

I must begin at the beginning. *Voltaire's Politics* did not start out as a book at all. In the early 1950s, when I was teaching the history of political thought at Columbia University, I found the secondary literature on the eighteenth century to be singularly unimpressive. In 1953, translating Ernst Cassirer's splendid interpretative essay, *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, I turned up some useful monographs on major political theorists of the age like Kant, or Locke, or Rousseau, but very little that was persuasive, even helpful, on that considerable body of second-rank (though by no means second-rate) eighteenth-century writers who had interesting political ideas of their own. Carl Becker's plausible and popular *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers*, first published in 1932 and still, after over twenty years, in print, struck me (and still strikes me) as clever and perverse, owing its reputation, and its readership, to its brevity, its wit, its glibness and its revisionism: the *philosophes*, Becker argued, were really medieval philosophers in modern dress, rationalists on the model of Thomas Aquinas, absurdly hopeful about the future, and egregiously unhistorical.

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ambitious portrait gallery with Voltaire, of whom I then knew only what everybody knew: he was an apostle of toleration who had coined that admirable saying, "I disagree with everything you say, but I shall fight to the death for your right to say it"; he was the sly adversary of revealed religion though, at the same time, he advocated preaching supernatural punishment to the masses to keep them in order; he was a servile courtier to the princes of his day — Frederick of Prussia, Catherine of Russia — and, not surprisingly, a champion of enlightened despotism. This, by and large, was what the textbooks taught me. There was even a whole book devoted to Voltaire's politics, a hapless published dissertation by Constance Rowe, *Voltaire and the State*, which worshipfully quoted each of Voltaire's libertarian pronouncements as though it had been inscribed on bronze and had, in its resounding generality, nothing whatever to do with the real political world of the eighteenth century. I did not know much, but I knew that I could — and must — do better than that.

By no means all of the literature on Voltaire was shallow or misleading, and it soon taught me one startling fact. Burdett I. Kinne's one-page article, "Voltaire Never Said It", disclosed that Voltaire's most famous *not*, "I disagree with everything you say," had actually been invented by E. Beatrice Hall, better known under her pseudonym S.G. Tallentyre, for use in her bulky biography of Voltaire, published in 1903. It was, she blandly informed Kinney, the kind of thing Voltaire might well have said.

The disclosure was liberating and confusing alike; it did not discredit Voltaire's reputation for tolerance, but it shook my confidence in what I thought — and nearly everyone else thought — about him. And I was further assisted in my search for the real Voltaire by a few thoughtful essays, and a handful of specialized monographs, such as Paul Chapin's *Voltaire chez les Calvinistes*, which showed a credible Voltaire at work during the last decades of his life, meddling with his neighbours, the Genevans. There was nothing for it; illuminations of this sort sent me to Voltaire's own immensely voluminous writings. I began with the obvious texts: his political pamphlets and essays, little broadsides like his much quoted *Idées républicaines*, and such celebrated miscellanées as his *Dictionnaire philosophique*. Once launched, I made another discovery, which markedly expanded my assignment, but at the same time sharpened my perceptions: even when Voltaire was not consistently or explicitly writing about politics, he was in politics up to his neck. I found remarkable, and to me invaluable, political material scattered across his plays, his poems, his stories and (of all places) his laboured

effort at producing a modern rival of Vergil's *Aeneid*, his interminable epic about Henri IV, the *Henriade*. It said far more about early eighteenth-century France than about late sixteenth-century France.

Having started, I found it impossible to predict where I could stop, what I could safely omit. The very definition of politics, of political thinking, was at issue. His short stories, his lyrics, his histories were all revealing, all indispensable. Two of the most valuable repositories of Voltaire's political ideas were his vast correspondence and his notebooks, both in the process of being authoritatively edited by Theodore Besterman. I ploughed through hundreds of his diary entries, thousands of his letters.

All this took time but the results exceeded my hopes. From his writings, published or unpublished, I recognized — or better, reconstructed — a new Voltaire: a highly political man persistently engaged in concrete issues in the most concrete possible way though not in the most concrete possible language. I learned to attribute this disparity between his involvement in fact, and detachment in prose, to two causes: the sheer familiarity of Voltaire and his readers with the issues he was addressing, and his fear of the authorities. Voltaire could safely confine himself to the most general allusions to himself issues. Besides, as we all know, Voltaire lived in an age of censorship. He needed to tread cautiously: he felt obliged not merely to deny authorship of his most provocative — notably his anti-Christian — tracts but also to adopt abstract formulations, to use self-protective devices in a game that everyone was playing. Inconsistent, irritable, sometimes short-tempered officials could make life hard, even for an almost untouchable celebrity like Voltaire, and so he used circumlocutions and denial which everyone would penetrate — but which everyone would credit his historians.

There was something extremely gratifying about this way of reading Voltaire. It was not principally that I was about to revise the dominant, almost unanimous, view of Voltaire's politics; it was rather — and I did not then clearly articulate this to myself — that I was discovering a human being. Voltaire emerged from the abstractions of the text books, or from the string of anecdotes and apophthegms that clustered about him, to come alive as a widely travelled Frenchman of his time, alert, informed, supremely intelligent, notably responsive to the countries he visited, to the writers and statesmen he engaged in conversation and correspondence.

Though it took me some time to discover this person, once I had him in my possession, the organization of my book imposed itself on me. I would have to begin with the reputations he had enjoyed — if "enjoyed" is the right

word here — and then follow him from place of residence to place of residence: from England to France to Prussia to Russia to Geneva, back to France again. Voltaire was certainly not a political theorist; he never developed a coherent structure of propositions. He was, rather, a moralist and publicist endowed with realistic judgment and quick wit, who depended on certain firm ethical convictions which organized his political perceptions. Voltaire was a relativist only about institutions. He was, then, logically enough, an Anglophile who admired English freedom and constitutional government as the best of all possible forms, but a royalist in France, implacably hostile to the obstructionist pretensions of nobilities of robe and sword alike, and confident that the king's ministers alone had the grasp and the disinterestedness to reform his native country. And while he was a more or less acquiescent — though by no means uncritical — supporter of the "enlightened" rulers governing such backward countries as Prussia and Russia, he proved a sympathetic observer of (and, after a while, participant in) the constitutional struggles dividing the Genevan republic, moving steadily to the left to support the claims of the disfranchised majority of the population. I found his flexibility in face of the complicated and venomous political in-fighting in Geneva particularly admirable — and particularly instructive: here was Voltaire that no one — almost no one — had ever seen.

It was in fact Voltaire's interventions in Genevan politics that provided me, with my epiphany, I had been studying his pamphlet *Idées républicaines*, assigned by nearly all of his editors, in 1762. But in tracing his part in the complicated negotiations — culminat-

ing in near-civil war — that tore the Genevan Republic apart in the early 1760s, I happened upon a "little plan of pacification", drawn up in mid-November 1765, though first published in the *Revue bleue* in 1908. I can still vividly recall the excitement that flooded me, right in the stacks of the Princeton Library, as I read that document, the "propositions à examiner pour apaiser les divisions de Genève". Here was my *maître à penser*. The plan contained, almost word for word, phrases, sentences, proposals I knew very well — from Voltaire's *Idées républicaines*. I rushed to Voltaire's letters of late 1765, copious as always, to find that he was indeed meddling in Genevan politics, entertaining local worthies and, as he told one of his acquaintances (while strenuously denying this to all the others) drawing up his little plan of pacification. The fit was perfect.

This discovery did not simply enable me to relate an important political essay of Voltaire's by three years. It confirmed the hypothesis that had increasingly taken hold of me: the most abstract generalizations in Voltaire's writings, his most remote pictures, were elements in current debate. He was a political man to his bones. This permitted me to reinterpret Voltaire the man and thinker from beginning to end — and more: it gave me a handle on the Enlightenment as a whole. I could see it now as far closer to life, far more engaged with reality, than had long been the fashion.

Thus in my method, my presentation, and my conclusions, I departed, not merely from the conventional view of Voltaire, but also from the traditional way of doing intellectual history, in which an idea spawns another idea, in which thinker confronts thinker in

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## To Haruspicate Or Scry

I do not see what skill  
with leaves in the cup, Mother Shipton or  
computer science, will tell us  
about the hardest of all things to know:  
What is to Come.

Sleep will often slough  
the hair off my head, slowly, with dreams  
of the old house, say, but all changed  
now, or flight, or that slow descent of the giant  
grimmon tunnel.

We know well enough what it is.  
That noisy-chargered mountebank and  
look-alike monster, both  
through not knowing, came a crash in Russia.  
In the end: those

marches the size of England but I  
would opt to be Wellington simply choose  
cover from view, to await  
the head of the great column, first two volleys and  
a firm square.

A damned close-run thing.  
But now, if I cannot see through the future  
as well as once in the past,  
remember my years, and forget or put it down to  
the lead in the petrol.

John Holloway



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In sum Paul Haggie has produced an admirably clear and generally fair account of an extremely complicated story. It is true that a more complete Glossary of Abbreviations and a better Index would have been helpful, and that occasional repetitions should have been eliminated; but I only detected one error in the footnotes, and one that quite minor. See that in twenty years have elapsed since Haggie first discussed this project with me, and I think that his translation from the groves of academe in Manchester University to the Foreign and Commonwealth Relations Office, where he is now a First Secretary, has enabled him to bring to the book a new objectivity and processes on to his previously acquired experience of historical research and writing. It will be interesting to see how closely his presentation of events and his conclusions correspond with those of Professor Arthur Marler, whose recently lamented death has frustrated completion of his study of Anglo-American naval relations. The next volume on the same subject as Haggie's is expected next autumn.



# Superficial damage

By Hugh Haughton

DAVID SWEETMAN:  
Looking Into the Deep End  
47pp. Faber, £3.  
0 571 11730 9

As a poet David Sweetman has a painter's fascination with surfaces – the surface of a swimming pool like a "fascinating parcel" ("crumpled paper surface, reflections of ravelled string"), a beach where "sandworms/put out spaghetti", a glazed pot which seems "a beach on the cracked oatmeal", "the blizzards of paint" on a canvas, or the human surface itself ("he kissed her breast till blood/straw-berried the skin"). But the analogy with painting – the poem "Creative Acts" looks at a series of visual arts, including photography, painting and architecture – doesn't afford the poet a license to depict an innocent world of pure appearance: the surface of the image, whether it be photo or "oleograph of wickedness", is as treacherous as the surface of the swimming-pool in which the African boy drowns in the title-poem.

In fact, David Sweetman is especially drawn to surfaces which have been inscribed in some way by human presence – a wall covered with graffiti, glass overlaid with the reflection of a face, bruised skin. His eye, like that of a detective, fixes on the marks and blemishes which record human projects and projections on the world of objects, scrutinizing the grubby fingerprints which reveal the hidden violence in the margins of life. In one poem, he speaks of "the menace of the ordinary", and most of his best poems focus upon the relation between violence and the ordinary – the moment when the ordinary world, whether in an African village or colonial home, in an Asian ricefield or Bakunin's Russian home or a rank stairwell in London, is lit up by the flare of violence (past, present, or future). In general, significance is conveyed by the metaphor of damage, a term linking the external to the psychological in this least psychological of poets. Sweetman is interested in the moment when things lose their innocence – as they are scarred ("painting the scene of napalm on a child's face"), or shattered ("a week after the funeral, kids smashed the windows/that now must hang like school maps of great islands"), or wrapped within the poem by the violence of poetic analogy (a pair of scissors in "The Circumcision of Karl", encompassing more than Donne's famous compasses, becomes an epitome of global violence).

"The Art of Pottery 1945" opens the book with the most devastating moment of violence in history – the dropping of the bomb on Nagasaki – yet it begins with a delicate evocation of the pots in a Japanese studio and a paradoxical celebration of the potter's creativity "seeming to strangle the reluctant clay", beginning creation "with the actions of death". The explosion of the bomb is a travesty of the moment of creation when the kiln is fired: it is the ultimate light-show ("uncountable neon-signs squandering rainbow"), and the poem only registers it in visual terms. The poet expresses no reaction, no "comment", no identification with the victims of the holocaust – the scale of the damage is unimaginable and was not only the flare of the explosion reflected on the skin of an unnamed individual, the potter Kenji, whose face is striped "the cold white and midnight blue of a mackerel's belly". That beautiful but also repellent image is as intimate as it is chillingly remote.

In the title poem Sweetman again leaves us "looking into the deep end" this time by way of focussing on the "innocent" game of "poo-poo" chess that ran and water play on the surface of a swimming-pool. The poem describes the death of an African boy from a "village a nation away from deep water": fascinated by the pool, the boy mistakes it and drowns. It is a little poem, but it is a very good one. It is a poem that is very much in the style of the world introduced by W.S. Lewis in "The Poem". The poem implies disturbing questions about modernization and Westernization, cultural disparity, the

guilt of the European onlooker who can "dive cleanly" into the deep end where the African boy drowns – but as in Sweetman's other poems such implications issue from his characteristic, undiscursive interest in a world of appearances, here the sensuous appeal of the pool and the black boy's dead body laid out beside it. Again the poem, with an appalled thrill of voyeuristic intimacy, homes in on the fact of flesh, and in particular on "the darkness, a shadow between the legs suggesting the outline of Africa that brought back those guilty explorations of childhood that boys share": the image condenses and evokes a complex reaction to an incident and at the same time to person, a race, a continent, a history – the stark fact of the boy's public hair calls up not only future sexual explorations, but the heart of darkness discovered by white explorers of the outline of Africa, the "guilty explorations" that lie behind the contours which the poet explores. The pool's surface, like Sweetman's other surfaces, reveals and conceals history; what another poem calls "the sharpness and danger" of the world.

A list of the characters and situations documented in this collection would have an exaggerated consistency and look a pretty grim catalogue: the old age of an unnamed inventor of toys and bombs; a blind man sitting for his

portrait; a psychiatric patient, surrounded since childhood by pornographic images of violence, reduced to painting walls "as white as his mind"; a burning baby (the poet's literal description of a cremation); a legless carnival freak; Anton Bakunin left behind in Siberia; a frustrated colonial wife dreaming of "the great image of France"; bereaved emigrants; aged widows; news photos of atrocity; a girl beaten up by her lover. Given the extreme injuriousness of his themes, the poems themselves are curiously flat, undramatic, almost toneless – they record violence but without using an emotive or hyperbolic language – with nothing of Lowell's combustible magnificence, or declaratory rhetoric of headache and heartache. David Sweetman's people grieve and come to grief quietly – as the poet quietly observes them, like a photographer on the edge of an event: his is a world with the sound switched off. The inner world of the characters can be detected only in their behaviour, or their symbiotic relationship to the things around them – since they don't speak.

What is perhaps the finest poem in the collection, "The Unhappy Inventor" – a commentary on a painting of George Grosz of that title – depicts the world of a lovable, harmless old man who tries to create "the indestructible being" out of bits and pieces of "metal

metaphors", as a way of forgetting his own invention of a bomb that had left "charred creatures and split stones in its wake". It ends with an eloquent image of silencing which encapsulates Sweetman's vision of the unspoken (and unspeakable):

After Dresden he made nothing more than amusements for his wife and listened silently to his wife's complaints While turning his wedding ring round and round as if somehow to lower the volume.

The gesture (it is like Dickens's Mr Merdle handcuffing his own hands) epitomizes the suffering implicit in the old man's life and marriage. The man in the Grosz picture is reimagined in the poem, and though he remains mute the poem speaks, as the saying goes, volumes.

The human surface, skin, appears with especial vividness in several poems. In one, his dead grandmother's skin looks so clear that he seems to see "like the bird in flight in every frozen pool": in another, a girl's face records with immense poignancy the damage that she will not articulate: "she never protests/ but tomorrow, dead leaves will lie/ beneath the frost of make-up/ she must wear". The poems, so def-

icient in emotive terms, are haunted by those silent signs of emotion becoming visible – tears: tears like things (they "roll from her eyes/like steel balls in a penny arcade") or things like tears ("the coke-tins with tear-drop openings"). So photos, tears, films, bruises, paintings, broken glass – Sweetman's visible world always reflects and deflects an invisible, inward one.

In the best poems, he does this with great subtlety, economy, and elegance: such poems reveal a fine and unobtrusively original talent. There are several others which are more "brilliant", more "inventive", and, to my mind less successful. These are the poems in the Raine manner – the poetic Marianne mode of "The Everyday Huyman", and "City Garden Epitome", – which work by mixed metaphor ("on a bench an old lady plaiting spaghetti with a chopstick in each hand") and far-fetched analogy where "everything" (as one poem says) "is something else" (thickly disguised). Sweetman is a subtle enough poet of the disguised violence and the invisibility of the ordinary world to dispense with such tricks whereby it is he who perpetrates the violence on things.

The handful of memorable poems in *Looking Into the Deep End* show a fidelity to surface that will leave the reader looking precisely there.

Most of the previous segments of this edition contained single correspondences, all the surviving letters that passed between Walpole and a particular friend. The two longest series were those with Horace Mann and Madame du Deffand, the latter consisting almost entirely of letters from this blind, elderly Frenchwoman who loved Walpole with desperate unhappiness and without reciprocation. Other outstanding correspondences were those with George Montagu, with the Countess of Upper Ossory, with Thomas Gray, and with Walpole's cousin, Henry Seymour Conway. There still remained the old and occasional letters from and to Walpole; these have now been brought together, in a single chronological sequence running to three volumes.

At the back of *Bull Song* there is a photograph of its author, head lowered and snarling, looking not unlike his eponymous animal. The person in George Tardios's poems is rather less fierce, although there is an adolescent self-importance about some of them: "The World is troubled/With a lack of looking/I sing my songs/The World sleeps." This poem, "Islands", is dated 1961 when the poet would have been sixteen. Like his other poems about Cyprus, it contains some fine images of sunlight and shadow and reflection; powerful imagery is there, but, however, only nineteen poems in *Bull Song*. Although we are told in the preface that they have been "selected and ordered to illustrate his development", it is hard to see that Tardios has developed very much.

And in full trees the ring-doves fill The air with softness. As they fall Shattering the silence with their flight They leave the silence in their wake. Not all his descriptions work as well as this. Some, like "Balestrand", fall flat and in others one has the impression of sparks being blown up for their meagre heat. Ward's presentation of people seldom rises above the level where children are "grubbiest cherubs" or "indisputably sweet girls". One exception is "A Childhood Recollection", his touching tribute to an eccentric

Labelled *Miscellaneous Correspondence* they are very miscellaneous indeed. Before he died (in October 1979) W.S. Lewis, the editor-in-chief, saw the volumes in proof and applied an introduction: "These letters, he writes, are 'not the whappings of the ballroom floor' and he then reels off the names of the famous whose correspondence with Walpole is all timed here. They are a glittering galaxy, to be sure: Garrick, Burke, Boswell, Burney, Chesterfield, Gibbon, Hume, and Voltaire. One cannot blame an editor who cries up his wares by putting his best names forward. But when we examine these exchanges with Walpole we find one letter to and six from Garrick (all trivial), one to and one from Boswell (ditto), one from Chesterfield (a short business note), five to Gibbon (four to and one from Hume (mainly about Rousseau's visit to England), and two to and two from Voltaire (all in 1768 and about the Frenchman's notorious disparagement of Shakespeare). How skimpy a showing these important names make can be seen in the statistics provided by John Riley, the co-editor: in all, 264 letters (592 by Walpole), to or from 330 different correspondents.

The letters to Gibbon are particularly rewarding, showing as they do Walpole's critical acumen and generous spirit. After he had read the initial volumes of the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (in 1766) he writes:

How do you know so much, and so well, possess your subject, and your knowledge and your power of judicious reflection so thoroughly, and yet so candidly yourself and betray no decided arrogance of decision? Very strange! You have a very ancient and very singularly accurate sense of the earliest times. Out of this hoard he compiled his *Anecdotes of Painting in England*, which, like his other publications, stimulated a volume of sporadic "miscellaneous

## A collector's connections

By Robert Halsband

HORACE WALPOLE:  
Correspondence  
Volumes 40-42, Miscellaneous Correspondence  
Edited by W.S. Lewis and John Riley, with the assistance of E. M. Martz and Ruth K. McClure.  
Vol. 40, 464pp. 0 300 01769 3  
Vol. 41, 480pp. 0 300 01770 7  
Vol. 42, 520pp. 0 300 01771 5  
Yale University Press, £75, the set.

Forty-three years have passed since the first instalment of the Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's correspondence was published; and now, with Volumes 40 to 42, that edition, in every sense a monumental one, is completed. (Still to come, in 1982, are one volume of Additions and Corrections and five volumes of index to the entire set.) Although opinions may differ as to the importance of Horace Walpole and the value of this edition, all must rejoice that this ever lengthening row of stout volumes, bound in dark blue buckram with richly gleaming gold-lettered spines, is now complete.

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Gibbon's was "a truly classic work."

Even if most of the stellar names disappoint expectations, and even though these volumes lack the concentrated and sustained interest of previous sections, they have an ample measure of illumination and fascination, displaying as they do facets of most of Walpole's main interests. From his earliest years he remained a sharp observer of the political scene; he was, after all, son of a prime minister and a Member of Parliament for twenty-seven years, until he withdrew to devote himself to literary and antiquarian pursuits. His constant stream of letters to Horace Mann paints a brilliant and vivid picture, if one often distorted by bias, of the political scene of his day. Not much of that comes into these scattered letters, except for the American Revolution, which he warmly supported, and the French Revolution, which he detested. He was frequently solicited to intercede with politicians for sinecures, pensions, church livings; or for a young man about to lose his life for forgery, impelled by his own feelings, he tried in vain to save the life of Admiral Byng.

Aside from his intermittent activity in political matters, Walpole's constant vocation lay in literature, fine arts, and antiquarianism. Each time he published a work of his own or by another, at his Strawberry Hill Press or with Dodsley, he sent out presentation copies and received thank-you notes in return. Readers unknown to him personally also sent letters of appreciation or correction or both. All these myriad notes and notelets, many of them so impersonal as to be couched in the third person, are duly strung out in these volumes. Yet even here there are illuminations of Walpole's attitude toward his own books.

When he wrote his tragedy of incest, *The Mysterious Mother*, he published it privately at his press, Yatchingbury, only to find it then, when he saw a newspaper beginning to serialize it without his permission, he protested to Woodfall, the printer:

At this time the public must be curious to see more interesting articles than scenes of an old tragedy on a disgusting subject, which the author thinks so little worthy of being published, that after the first small impression, he has endeavoured to suppress it as much as lies in his power.

In two other letters he calls the tragedy "disgusting" – perhaps using the word in its etymological sense of distasteful. To guard against the unauthorized publication he issued the play himself in a trade edition; his *Oedipus* (1766) is so close to his own relationship to his mother that one must suspect that his compulsion, derived from feelings of guilt, led him not only to write the revelatory play but to disseminate and then withdraw it.

His concern with a work of less personal involvement, his pioneer Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto*, also finds a place here. While it was being adapted for the stage by Robert Jephson, a playwright whom he grossly overpraised, he exchanged letters with the eager adapter – and to good purpose, for when put on the stage as *The Count of Narbonne* (in 1781) it was a great success. This mini-correspondence tells us something of the theatre of the time.

As important, perhaps, as his original writings was Walpole's service to the fine arts in England. This came mainly from his having bought (in 1750) George Vertue's manuscript collections from his widow – forty notebooks filled with jumbled scraps of gossip and information about painters, engravers, sculptors, and architects from the earliest times. Out of this hoard he compiled his *Anecdotes of Painting in England*, which, like his other publications, stimulated a volume of sporadic "miscellaneous

correspondence." One exchange demonstrates how admirably open-minded Walpole was in matters of historical accuracy. When John Nichols ventures to point out some errors in the *Anecdotes*, Walpole exults:

Good God! Sir, what am I, that I should be offended at or be above criticism or correction? I do not know who ought to be – I am sure, no author. I am a private man, of no consequence, and at best an author of very moderate abilities. In a work that comprehends so much biography as my *Anecdotes of Painting*, it would have been impossible, even with much more diligence than I employed, not to make numberless mistakes. It is kind to me to point out those errors; to the world it is justice.

He could be as open and receptive in his antiquarian pursuits. To the Bishop of Carlisle he writes: "You are ever kind and obliging to me, and I indulge my virtuous humour with as much charity, as if a passion for collecting were a Christian want. I thank you much for the letter on King James's death..." How apt his phrase is: a passion for collecting. The historical relics he gathered, magpie-like, to display at Strawberry Hill, although sometimes ridiculed by his detractors, served him as concrete and visible signs of a distant past.

Walpole may have romanticized the past because he observed the present with such cynical detachment. In his reports of "the great world" he elevated gossip into art. Nothing in these new volumes can match his gossiping letters to Montagu, Mann, or Lady Ossory, although in those to the last-named he suppressed the salacious anecdote and paid rather too much obedience to her ladyship's rank. (She had been an adulterous duchess before marrying her earl-lover.) Verbal gallantry, if not excessive, could leave his social excuses with wit, as when he writes here to Lady Jersey:

I am much honoured, Madam, by the message your Ladyship was so good as to leave for me yesterday; and I would fly to obey it, if, as I have almost lost the use of my feet, I had got any wings in their room. I have been confined this month by the gout, and though I just crawl out again a little, I am forced to be led, and own I have not courage enough yet to come into your room like an old beggar.

He was comfortable enough with members of the peerage, but when confronted by royalty he cutseyed so low (so to speak) that his knee touched the floor. His anecdote when she became Duchess of Gloucester, as suddenly ascended to awesome heights in these volumes he addresses a polite letter (in 1786) to Stanislas II, King of Poland: "I will not, Sir, steal more of those precious moments which your Majesty consecrates to all the virtues of beneficence, nor attempt to paint the sentiments with which I am penetrated." It sounds like parody, even the gallantry that ends the sentence. He himself became Fourth Earl of Orford at the age of seventy-five, succeeding his mad nephew; and his last was so delicate that in the interval between the death and the burial of his nephew he signed his letters "The Uncle of the late Earl of Orford." Perhaps he was so rank-conscious because his family's rise from country gentry into the peerage was of such recent date.

In this miscellany we would not expect to find the intimate, personal letters that Walpole sent to his closest friends. But one casual correspondent in these volumes, John Crauford, whom he had met in Paris a short time before, stimulated him (in 1766) to this psychological self-portrait:

Consider how little time you have known me, and what small opportunities you have had of knowing my faults. I know them



This portrait of a Hong Merchant by George Chinnery, which measures only 10x5in, is included in a sale of "Important English Pictures" at Christie's, 8 King St, London SW1 on June 26. Chinnery (1774-1852) lived and painted in the East for the last fifty years of his life. In 1814 in Calcutta he drew a portrait of Thackeray, aged three, and his parents.

thoroughly; but to keep your friendship within bounds, consider my heart is not like yours, young, good, warm, sincere, and impatient to bestow itself. Mine is worn with the baseness, treachery, and mercenariness I have met with. It is suspicious, doubtful and cooled. I consider everything round me but in the light of amusement, because if I looked at it seriously I should deem it I laugh, that I may not weep. [Compare this to his remark to Mann in 1742: "The world is a comedy to those that think a tragedy to those that feel"]. But don't love me, pray don't love me. Old folks are but old women, who love their last lover as much as they did their first. I should still be liable to believe you, and I am not at all of Madame du Deffand's opinion that one might as well be dead as not love somebody – I think one had better be dead than love anybody.

Even granted an element of rhetorical posturing, Walpole persuades us that he has persuaded himself of his sincerity. As to why he confided in a relative stranger, is it not tempting sometimes to confide in a sympathetic acquaintance rather than in a friend, who from his greater knowledge is apt to judge objectively? Besides, in this instance the vigorous young man may have appealed to Walpole's homosexual feelings, generally kept under careful censorship.

There are other bright gleams of interest among these odds and ends. They include a long letter from John Baskerville, the Birmingham printer; one from Christopher Wren's grandson (correcting Walpole's account of the architect); an appealing (in both senses) letter from James MacLaine, the highwayman who had robbed Walpole and was destined for Tyburn; and several letters to the peripatetic Lady Craven, who travelled over Europe as though she were crossing Beldy Square. Yet the ultimate justification for this "miscellaneous correspondence" rests on the fact that the Yale Walpole, given its scope and scale, needed to be completed. These volumes accomplish that in an efficient, workmanlike way.

Two basic issues, however, require justification: how important a figure is Horace Walpole; and, derived from this, does his correspondence deserve this immense and costly edition?

There is no need at this late date to defend Walpole's reputation

as a master of the eighteenth-century familiar letter, along with Gray, Johnson, a Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and Cowper. If he lacks the "heart" of Madame de Sévigné, whom he literally worshipped, he has a greater range of interest and of expression. He is sometimes criticized for being too mindful of his letters as a literary legacy: after he asked Mann to return them, he prepared them for publication after his death. Like other writers of his time he was fully aware – as we are not – of the venerable tradition behind letters as a literary genre. In Classical Rome Cicero, Seneca, and Pliny composed their epistolary works with due deliberation; the Renaissance continued the practice; and in seventeenth-century France the tradition flourished in Voiture and Balzac as well as in the ineffectual Madame de Sévigné. And so to criticize Walpole for being an ineffectual letter writer because he was artful in composing them is to judge him by a simplistic standard of modesty.

Lytton Strachey tried to put his finger on what it was that made Walpole such an admirable letter writer: "Perhaps the really essential element in the letter writer's make-up is a sudden sense of femininity" – which would explain why Strachey himself wrote such brilliant letters. He also defended Walpole from Macaulay's notoriously savage attack. Macaulay, when he wrote his review (in 1833), gleefully confessed to his sister that he had "laid it on Walpole... unsparingly"; yet he had to grant that Walpole's writings possessed "irresistible charm... he keeps the mind of the reader constantly attentive and constantly entertained." A writer who could win such praise in the teeth of such violent animosity deserved a proper edition.

This was at least approximated when in 1903 Mrs Paget Toynbee published, under the aegis of the Clarendon Press, sixteen volumes of Walpole's letters. This was clearly a "reading edition", very lightly annotated, in small, handy volumes that contained only Walpole's side of his correspondence in a single chronological sequence. When Strachey reviewed it he thought it fell "short of the ideal", and he explained why: "A great many passages 'quite unfit for publication' have been omitted from the letters to Sir Horace Mann.... The *feune* file is certainly not an adequate reason, and, even if she

## Confident misconstructions

By Michael Hofmann

Four German Poets:  
Günter Eich, Hilde Domin, Erich Fried, Günter Knecht  
Translated and edited by Agnes Stein  
156pp. Red Dust, \$12.95.  
0 87376 034 4

There are several reasons why poetry should attract translations of a standard inconvertible-for-praise. With fewer words per page, rudimentary does not operate as a deterrent. There is also the superstition that poetry is internationally homogeneous, an Esperanto of the soul which allows true poets to understand one another intuitively and without grammar. Third, as everybody knows, poetry is allied to madness, and deals with the incommensurable, so that not even the bare minimum of coherence and probability is required for verse. The halcyon lyric of Apollo became a trained and per-

forming tortoise" in Ezra Pound's inspired version.

Agnes Stein claims to have spent nine years in Germany. How is it, then, that she is thrown by ordinary constructions, and that she is ignorant of the meaning of words that are in the active vocabulary of any nine-year-old? Words like *Falle, Strom, appig*; or even *Schiff*, which appears as "ledge" in one poem, and on the opposite page, correctly, as "reed". One can almost envy the confidence which produces lines like "We continue to point towards good fortune/ but it sits badly in our chairs" and which doesn't feel compelled to reach for a dictionary and find that *die einfließen* means "to prepare oneself for" (happiness); or the unorthodox nonsense of "The other side is the other/ and here is here and the boat crossings/ long established", where a guess of average intelligence would suffice to point out that the German word *eingelegt* clearly has to mean the opposite, "suspended" or "abolished". In a humdrum translation of one of the most masterful of German post-war poems, Günter Eich's "Wacht auf, denn eure Träume sind schrecklich" ("Awaken! for your dreams are bad") inexorably cut by Stein to

the banal "Dreams"), we have the following lines: "The waters have already risen inside/ the enclosure and the posts are manned." Eich's meaning is actually "The fences are already electrified, and the sentries on duty."

With such a level of translation, one can have little faith in the editor's ship. And there is, in fact, little reason to put Eich, Domin, Fried and Knecht together in a book. Agnes Stein says much when she attributes her selection to "the differences they exhibit, starting out from different points of time and space". There are, however, considerably more reasons to choose a group of East German poets, for instance, of a group of women poets; or to put together an anthology of "Gruppe 47", and thereby illustrate the phenomenon – one that is potentially fascinating for an English-speaking readership – of the painful re-emergence of a national literature from the ruins of what was, after all, the language of the Nazis. Agnes Stein's involvement with German poetry and plays such a lack of comprehension that it is difficult to see how she can even be read; let alone want to publish translations of it.



status of elections in democratic countries; election is considered under headings which include Politics, Economics and the Trade Union Movement, Public Opinion Polls in the 1970s, Election Financing, The Electoral Women and Elections in Britain, and Why the Conservative Won. There is also an appendix in which the campaigns of the three major parties are subjected to a detailed analysis. A particular interest is Michael Finkel's description of the financing of the campaigns, in which he demonstrates that the campaign expenditure per vote was considerably higher than that in the 1976 American presidential election.

**Christopher Mendez**  
51 Lexington Street, London W1  
telephone 01-734 2385  
Monday-Friday 10-6  
Catalogues £1, including postage

*Britain at the Polls 1979: A Study of the General Election*. (346pp. Edited by Howard R. Pennington. American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1150 Seventeenth Street, N.W., Washington, DC, 20036. ISBN 0-8473-3401-5) is the latest in a series of studies of elections in democratic countries; election is considered under headings which include Politics, Economics and the Trade Unions 1979-1979, Public Opinion Polls in the 1970s, Financing the Election, Women and Elections in Britain, and Why the Conservatives Won. The plan of the study, which is the campaign of the three major parties is subjected to a detailed analysis. A particular interest is Michael Pinto-Duschinsky's description of the financing of the campaigns, in which demonstrates that total campaign expenditure per vote was considerably higher than that in the 1976 American presidential election.